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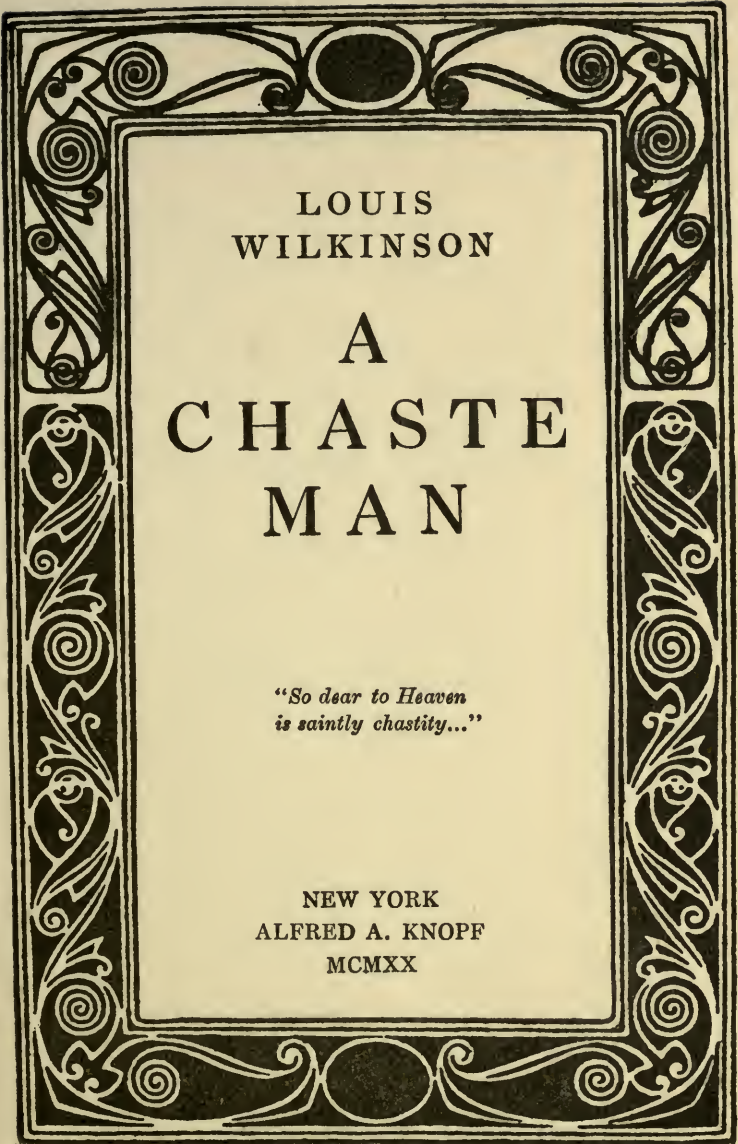
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**A
CHASTE
MAN**



NOVELS BY LOUIS WILKINSON

THE BUFFOON
A CHASTE MAN
BRUTE GODS



LOUIS
WILKINSON

A
CHASTE
MAN

*"So dear to Heaven
is saintly chastity..."*

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ALFRED A. KNOFF
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A CHASTE MAN

CHAPTER I

OLIVER LAWRANCE was back home from the Office. He lived with his wife in a house of moderate pretension in Chiswick; and he spent his working hours on the premises of Ralston, Inge & Co.,—an amalgamation for business purposes of two enterprises rather surprisingly diverse, *The Occultists' Magazine* and *The Applied Arts' Review*.

The young man was tired and a little morose. As he sat on a chair in the bathroom, drying his hands, he heard the teasing echo of old Ralston's voice, with its fatigued insistence, dictating letters: "We shall be glad, therefore, of a cheque in settlement of your account with us at your early convenience"—or "at your earliest convenience"—or "at your very earliest convenience": the three variations of formula, repeated day after day. Life seemed to be made up of repetition and imitation. All those people in the "Tube" train, coming home from their Offices to their wives. . . . Business, family; family, business. Awful, when it struck you. And these thoughts themselves were being daily repeated in thousands of minds.

There came a light tap at the door—how well Lawrance knew those light taps!—and his wife appeared.

He kissed her, wondering as he did so at the substantiality of the fact of their cohabitation.

"How dear of you, Doll!" she said. "I saw it."

"What did you see, eh?" He was at once artificially bright.

They went downstairs.

"You know. A great—big—"

"Ah!"

"—bottle of fizz!"

"Greedy little wretch!" He put his arm round her. "Fancy your noticing that!"

"Fancy! And how could I help it, sir? Right in the middle of the table!—Doesn't it seem weird that it was three years ago to-day that we were married?"

"Three years ago—yes—by Jove—"

He tried to think of some appropriately playful and affectionate retort. No one could, with a more sensible acuteness than his wife, have rasped the exposed nerves of his present mood. He disliked her would-be "bon camarade" use of the slang term "fizz" for champagne, and the way she dragged in the word "weird,"—he disliked that kind of thing in her extravagantly, unreasonably, morbidly, though he was not by nature morbid. It was all, he thought, because he knew her too well, because of this business of their living together, under the same roof, year in and year out.

"How pretty you look to-night, darling!" he said as they went into the drawing-room.

It was true. Muriel Lawrance had light, soft hair, with a tinge of light gold; the tone of her blue eyes was clear, her colouring was delicate and fresh. What her husband actually thought as he praised her looks was:

"Your mouth is too small and tight, there isn't enough of your hair; there's something mean about your eyes, I wish they were larger."

Muriel glanced away from him, smiling. "Oh, of course," she said. "Today's the day for compliments. Compliments and champagne!"

She was pleased. Lawrance reflected that little tributes always pleased her, that the incidentals of a light and innocent flirtation were really more to her taste than anything else. She was not passionate: it would really have suited her to have gone on being engaged to him forever. His dark skin flushed: his heavy hot underlip twitched with a suggestion that it often gave of suffering under control.

He got up hurriedly, so that she should not notice. "One minute," he said. "I've something to show you"; and he went into the hall to get from his overcoat pocket the trinket he had bought her.

"Shut your eyes!" he cried as he came back, and as she did so he went behind her and put his gift round her pink neck. "Don't open them yet." He fastened the chain—a chain of Venetian make, with coloured half-precious stones. "Now you can look!"

Muriel exclaimed, she was radiant, she kissed him, she went to the glass.

"How pretty! And how clever of you!" She kissed him again. "And I've something to show *you*! When we go to dinner."

He kept on forcing a happy exuberance till the maid came in to tell them that dinner was ready. - The starchy cleanliness of the linen was stressed, so was the brightness of the silver, the pretty orderliness of everything.

Muriel had evidently concerned herself. By Lawrance's plate there was a little package; he opened it at once, and found a pair of gold cuff-links. He tried to thank his wife feelingly, but he could not: he aimed at making up for that by emphasis, by saying too much, by taking off the cuff-links that he had on and putting the others in their place. She went over and helped him; he bit his lips to hide his irritation.

"Oh, what's this?" she said rather sharply. She tapped the edge of a little cardboard box that showed protruding from one of his inner pockets.

"Oh!" He took the box out, instinctively countering his impulse to thrust it further down. "Do you want to look at it? Something I got for little Olga Flynn."

"Oh, no; don't trouble to undo the string." She went on putting in his cuff-link. "There!" She sat down again, and they began drinking their soup.

"It's her birthday to-morrow, you know, darling. I'm going up there for lunch from the Office."

"Yes."

Lawrance was furious. He bitterly contested his wife's right to her jealousy. It was not fair for her to be of cold temperament and jealous at the same time. It was absurd, he had known Olga since she was a very little girl: she was a little girl still. He was an old friend of the family. Absurd. Now if he had taken up with some woman— He had never been unfaithful to Muriel, and that reflection angered him further. Perhaps actual patent infidelities were the only means of keeping some wives in order.

"How old is Olga Flynn now?" Muriel's tone was clear and thin,—suspiciously unimportant.

"Oh, I think she'll be fifteen to-morrow. No; sixteen, I believe."

"Oh, I didn't know."

Lawrance finished his soup. "I'll open the champagne, Mary," he said to the servant.

There was nothing new about this, that was the worst of it; there would be nothing new in what was coming. That suspiciously unimportant tone, how well-known it was! And there were never any climaxes, any catastrophic finales. Violence—of some sort, of any sort,—would have been better. . . . Jealousy of Olga Flynn, though, that was new to Lawrance; not new, he now suspected, to his wife, for she had been so exactly like this before. No doubt that jealousy accounted for other little scenes, ostensibly backed by other motives.

They had chicken, which was rather tough—not well cooked. Muriel drank very little of the wine: the infringement, for his pleasure, of her claims, had to be noted. Her abstinence served as an opportune assertion of Puritanism, an assertion against him, for rebuke.

"Don't you like that champagne, darling?" It was again the familiar conjugal use of this endearing term, to balance a betrayed annoyance of tone.

"Oh, yes; I was afraid you didn't like your chicken."

The presence of the maid constrained them, so they talked incessantly and pointlessly on usual topics. The young husband drank a good deal, but the wine had no effect on him. He was too angry and too much disturbed for that.

Over dessert they were silent at first. He knew that if he talked she would gain her advantage by brief answers, and she thought that he would play the same

game. At last he was so nervous that he had to speak.

"Come!" he cried, "I must fill your glass. There." Then he emptied the bottle into his own glass. "Let's drink to the day!"

"The day!" She gave a little shudder. "Oh, I don't like that. It reminds me of those awful Germans."

"Well, I'll drink to you!—Now, return the compliment, you naughty girl!" Muriel sipped. "Now to British arms!"

She drank all her wine at a gulp, scoring off him. The hit was so cheap and obvious that he would have indifferently despised it coming from any one else, but he hated her for it; and she took it so seriously, she was really pleased with herself, she thought she had managed cleverly.

He was silent: she would think, he knew, that he was sulking. He resolved to ignore that. His resentment against her fermented in him, he felt miserably stirred up, and entirely helpless.

"Well!" she said after awhile. "And what are you thinking about?" She spoke graciously; she implied: "Now that you're punished, I'm willing to forgive you."

"Oh, about old Flynn and his family."

Old Flynn was Olga's step-father. Lawrance had not really been thinking of him; he had been thinking of bachelor flats in West Kensington and envying the men who lived in them.

"You always did find them interesting, didn't you?" Muriel guessed rightly that the reply was intended to annoy her. She returned at once to the defensive, to the watch for an opening for attack.

"I find them interesting, certainly."

"Well, Doll *dear*, you can't say that I've ever stood in your way."

"No, not exactly; but, after all, I told you all about them before we were married. I said I couldn't drop them—"

"Wouldn't drop them."

"If you like. Yes, I wouldn't—or couldn't. I couldn't treat old Flynn and his wife shabbily."

"You certainly haven't done that."

"I hope not."

"Well, you might have married a girl who would have thought them horrid."

Lawrance raised his thick eyebrows. "You do think them horrid, don't you?"

"Oh, no. Only they're not the sort of people one knows."

"I know them and you don't. What on earth is the use of discussing it?"

"Oh, I suppose you think I'm complaining."

"No, I don't." He got up from his chair. "Why should you complain?"

"Why? There are a great many women who would."

"They don't concern us, do they?"

"A great many women who would think they took up a lot of your time—"

"Oh!"

"And—and—"—she was tearful—"took you away from them!"

"Oh, come now, Maggie,"—he often used abbreviations of her other name—"we see quite enough of one another. You have your own friends."

"How—how horrid you are to me!" She began to

cry. "And to-night—when I thought we were going to be so happy!"

"I don't see why telling the truth should make you unhappy." He was bitter in his obstinacy, in his determination not to consider her hurt vanity. "We do see enough of one another. I didn't say we saw too much."

"No, but you meant it!"

"Nonsense!" He gave his head an impatient jerk. "I say what I mean. You don't want me to be uxorious, do you? To be always about the house when I'm not at the Office? To feel that I'm tied down? It's a dangerous thing for two people to be always under one another's noses—however fond they may be of each other. In fact," he went on with some heat, "the fonder they are the more dangerous it is."

"Oh!" She dried her eyes and spoke sarcastically. "I wonder why people marry then!"

"So do I—if they can't be sensible about it!" He turned to go.

"I'm as sensible as I can be! Haven't I been—well—haven't I been *good* about these people?" She got up and went over to him. "Don't be so horrid, Oliver." Her voice shook petulantly. "I'm sure it's I who might be horrid, not you! There aren't many—"

"My dear girl, I don't want to be horrid in the least. Why should we go raking over all this? What good does it do?"

"Well, it's only that you don't seem to see it from my point of view. Of course I don't mind—not for myself—I know it's all right—of course. It's only what other people might think. They might think it wasn't only Mr. and Mrs. Flynn. They've three girls, you know, Oliver."

"Three *little* girls."

"Doris isn't a little girl; she's eighteen now, isn't she?"

"Good heavens, you don't think I'm interested in *Doris*!—I don't know how old she is."

"She was fifteen when we married."

"I tell you I'm not interested in her in the least—"

"Well, that means you're interested in Olga! You know you are!"

He looked straight at her. The necklace he had given her caught his eye. He was enraged.

"This is intolerable, Muriel! I thought you were above this kind of absurd jealousy! I knew them all when they were little girls. Do you want me to drop the family the instant they grow up? What is it that you do want? I wish to goodness you'd state it clearly—"

"I wish you wouldn't be so violent. I'm not jealous: but naturally I don't want you to be drawn into any—any sort of an affair. I wouldn't mind if I wasn't fond of you! Oh, Doll!" She broke down. He went to the door, leaving her. "Don't go away!" She was sobbing. "How can you go away like that?"

"It's much better not to continue this. You'll be accusing me of an 'interest' in Marjorie next. She's ten, I believe—if we must be so particular about all their ages. Don't you see, Muriel, how undignified and absurd this kind of a scene is? And nothing can come of it. Either you want me to drop them, or you don't. If you don't, well and good. If you do—well, I won't." He made the emphasis deliberately brutal. She was silent. "You knew, before we married, that I meant to keep on with them."

"That wasn't the same thing, they were all children then—"

"I don't remember any limiting clause, breaking up all relations when they grew older. The older Mr. and Mrs. Flynn are, the more indecent it is to chuck them. I suppose I ought to stipulate that their children are kept under lock and key when I go to see them?"

"Oh, you wouldn't go so often then!"

"You are impossible." He left the room abruptly.

A few minutes later he left the house, and took a long walk: up the Chiswick High Road, and then on to the river. He speculated with extreme bitterness upon the nature of feminine jealousy; arguing that a woman could be jealous of anything that gave her man pleasure or even occupation apart from herself, no matter whether relating to sex or not. Yes, Muriel had always been opposed to his special individual pleasures. He was of course biased, with a sinister personal swerve; his train of thought was viciously and almost wilfully emotional. Again and again he went back to his wife's coldness of the flesh, and hated her for it: hated her with double edge because of his conviction that this very coldness enlarged the range of her jealousies and made them more fretfully acute.—And then the dull, stale recurrences of everything at "home"—recurrences on which this anniversary had set a confirming seal!—Of the girl Olga he refused to think at all, instinctive thoughts that might give any justification to spoil his own arguments to himself. His satisfaction in his grounded resolution not to give up the knowledge that Muriel could not shake him there, and knew she could not shake him.

CHAPTER II

LAWRANCE did not see his wife again before he went to the Office the next morning. She told him through her bedroom door that she had a bad headache and could not come down to breakfast. "Oh, all right; I'm sorry," he said, then breakfasted impatiently, and walked off with his daily paper under his arm to take the motor-bus to Hammersmith Broadway. In the Tube he kept thinking of old Flynn and his family, he nursed his affection for them and looked forward to the lunch in their familiar house in the Glasden Road. Suddenly he remembered Olga's present: he began to search his pockets for it: he could not find it anywhere—how extraordinarily vexing! Well, he must have left it behind; he could not remember whether he had taken it from the dining-room table or not, he rather thought he had. Suppose Muriel had got it now, suppose she were to pretend it was lost . . . another miserable business! He certainly couldn't turn up at the Flynns' without it. If it were lost—or appropriated—he would buy a new one. It was a gold bracelet he had bought for her, not an expensive one, but costing more than he was used to give. Still, he knew it was what the girl wanted. Of course Muriel would think it had cost him a great deal of his present to her. So it had, but he had not meant it to—of course not: the thing was most unpleasant—Lawrance heard the conductor call out "Caledon Road!" He left his seat in annoyed haste. He

had gone past his station, he would be late at the Office, and he would have to leave early to allow for going home again for the bracelet.

Mr. Inge, obese and pale, greeted him with his usual mixture of peevishness and affability:

“ ‘Morning, Mr. Lawrance. Don’t apologize, though the Lord knows we’ve enough to see to today. What I particularly want you to do is to read through this number of the ‘Astrologist,’—pick that confounded silly article of Hyman’s to pieces. Expose Hyman as a charlatan—March number—discredit him—just your style—vivid, condensed, hit straight from the shoulder—you know the trick. Capital. ‘Gross and ignorant distortion of the Vedantic philosophy.’ You know the angle, show what an ass the man is and don’t be too gentlemanly about it. Lam him. That’s the style now, all these modern fellows are doing it. How about calling the article ‘The Asinolabe’—taking the donkey’s measure—see? Good idea, eh? Take it for what it’s worth. You’ve a free hand, of course, absolutely free hand.—Don’t sit down. I want a talk with you on general business. Come along with me.”

Lawrance followed Mr. Inge’s lumbering loose form through the plate-glass door into the private room. He was familiar with these garrulous expositions of inept craft. Talks on “general business” were inevitable every Saturday morning, when Mr. Ralston was out of town.

“Ah—” Inge sighed deeply, a look of care crossed his blurred features, as he began turning over papers on his table. He sat down heavily. “I’m full of ideas, my boy, worn out by ’em. Too much for me. Fact is, my habit of mind’s too much for my habit of body. Yabbit

of body. The war's wearing on me, too. Horrible business, and the circulation of the *Review's* going down." He lowered his voice. "Did you know that, Lawrance? You're a stockholder, you ought to know. Feel it my duty to consult you about general business."

"Yes, I was afraid the *Review* was being hit." Lawrance was thinking of the bracelet, and wondering if he would be able to get off by half-past twelve.

"Of course, the Mag's done fairly well. Horoscopes of the rulers, and all that. Biblical prophecies. No doubt we've enlarged our circle of religious readers, no doubt at all. And those Villeul Angels helped us a lot. But times are bad for the Applied Arts. . . . We can't chuck the *Review*, even if it comes to be a dead loss. Burpham would take all his money out like a shot—all of it. You know that."

Mr. Inge put his hands on the arms of his chair and strained forward. The veins on his forehead suggested caterpillars to Lawrance—they suggested the silkworms that he used to keep at school. They were crinkly and soft and abnormal, in the same way.

"You see, Lawrance, we've got to study the Posters. Now what do you think of this? Poster for the Mag. First—in fairly small lettering: 'What will be.'—'What will be.' You get that? Then underneath—bold big print—'Big Sea-Fight off Scotch Coast.' 'Air Raid on Berlin.' 'Sweden Enters War for Central Powers, Holland for Allies.'"

"Not all at once, you don't mean?"

"Well—ah—perhaps—no, not all at once." Inge looked discouraged. "Just one or two striking items of forecast, that was my idea. Surely you must see that would help sales enormously. Why, a Poster like that

would draw anybody! Honestly, now, you must agree with me?"

"Honestly, I don't think the scheme has staying-power."

This was a phrase regularly used by Lawrance to counter Mr. Inge, who was, rather curiously, worth the pains of countering. For his brilliancy could almost equal his silliness, as Mr. Ralston knew.

"Oh, we'd vary it!—of course, we'd vary it! That's the whole essence of advertisement—change of tactics—very spirit of it, no doubt about that! Might try that Poster business for one week, don't you think?"

"Too risky, seems to me—only make ourselves a general laughingstock."

"Well, and what of that!" Mr. Inge slapped the blotting pad with a hand that itself looked as absorbent as blottingpaper. "What of that? Not bad at all to be a general laughingstock, or a general anything. Notoriety's what we want, that's what pays."

"How about talking it over with Mr. Ralston? Perhaps you have—"

"Ah—er—I shall, of course, I shall." Mr. Inge's small brown eyes relapsed to a momentary furtiveness. "But you're a young fellow; not thirty yet, are you?—Ah, twenty-nine, good age, twenty-nine. Young blood—vim and enterprise. What we must have." He smiled, and looked like an impostor in the seraphic choir. Lawrance curiously surveyed the rolling expanse of his clean-shaven face. "Vim," Mr. Inge repeated, "Vim. If I had as much vim in my body as I have in my mind—ah!" He was overcast: his melancholy seemed to run to fat even more than his enthusiasm. "Well, anyhow, my boy, I've put the Mag. on its feet, no one can deny

that. In a rut when I took it out of Bollinger's hands. I've put what the Yanks call 'pep' into it, no one can deny that. All going to dry-rot, full of heavy technical stuff, Karma and Yogi, and all that. Abstract. Who cares about the abstract? We've got down to the concrete. Facts of psychic experience—premonitions—apparitions—apports—Case of Mr. X and Mrs. Y. Oh, by the bye, Lawrance, how about that article on 'Children and Elementals'—experience of that little girl you know up in Highbury?—Ah, Glasden Road, yes, of course, Glasden Road. I must think out a good title. Have you got the material?"

"Not quite in shape yet. But I have an appointment with her people to-day. The article will be ready for Press Monday."

"Good. Excellent subject. Curious thing, Lawrance, people who are interested in psychic matters are nearly always interested in children too. So with an article like that you get the double appeal. Just tell me again about that Camden Road stuff. Violent Elemental manifestations, weren't they? Child thrown out of its bed, that kind of thing?"

"Well, she woke up feeling that she was being shaken—"

"Same thing, same thing. You can put 'thrown out of bed.' Good sensational stuff, that's what we want. Then didn't she see a large black thing with yellow eyes?"

"Something of that kind. She heard a crash, too, thought the washstand was smashed—"

"Washstand smashed. Put in a photograph of the smashed washstand. Capital."

"It wasn't smashed, as a matter of fact."

“Ah, well, send the article in to me before it goes through, as usual. Get a photograph of the child—in her nightdress, I think—yes, an appropriate and harmonious touch. Name can be used, can’t it? No objection to that?”

“Not if we pay five guineas.”

“Five guineas—’m, bit steep. Get it for three if you can, Lawrance—or four at the outside. Can’t connect it with the war, can you? Crash—Zeppelin raids—might be done? No: suggest rationalistic explanation, that wouldn’t do. Wish Ralston wouldn’t mess my copy up the way he’s been doing lately; some of my best touches, cuts ’em all out. Wish he’d stick to the Applied Arts. That’s his job, really. Don’t think he recognizes what I’ve done for the business. Just look at our American sales these last two years. Doubled—more than doubled. My trip out there did no end of good, you know that. I pulled things off right and left in Chicago—permanent effect—worth thousands to us. Ralston couldn’t have done anything there. They all said I looked like Bryan; no one’d ever say that of Ralston—”

“I’m quite sure Mr. Ralston appreciated the value of your trip in the States.”

“Well, he ought to, he ought to. Great mistake, this conservative point of view. Remember how peeved he was over Welman’s libel suit? Best thing that ever happened to the Mag., and only a farthing damages! Gad, how we skinned that ‘Order of the Saffron Rose’ of theirs! Just the right kind of hints at immorality, too; couldn’t have been better done. That was my masterpiece, Lawrance—though I say it, that whole affair was a masterpiece!” His eyes twinkled brightly, his discourse was heightening his spirits. “Now old Bollinger would

never have had the *nous* for a stunt of that kind! Impossible. You need the knack—either you're born with it or you're not. Never get into a rut, my boy. I've never been in a rut in my life, and I'm past fifty, worse luck!"

"You wanted that thing about Hyman to-day, I think you said." Lawrance got up.

"Oh, yes, but there's plenty of time, plenty of time, really."

"I ought to get off pretty early to keep that appointment in Glasden Road."

"Glasden Road—Glasden—? Ah, I remember. Child and Elementals. Incubi and Succubi. What was her name?"

"Marjorie Flynn."

"Oh, yes. Child of ten, you said? My memory holds all right. Constant practice, that's the only way. Why, that School of Memory Training I used to be in, I made it—literally made it! Wonder how Ralston accounts for my success. Feel of the public pulse, I've always had it. Born with it. Advertising, memory training, occultism—doesn't matter what it is, I've the instinct! Ralston knows it, too,—it's jealousy, that's what it is. Do you know, Lawrance,"—he dropped to a low portentous tone—"do you know I really believe he'd like to chuck me out of this? He couldn't, of course, but he'd be willing to let the whole show go to pot from sheer jealousy! Wish he'd attend to his own work, and keep Burpham in hand more than he does. I can't deal with Milord Burpham, Ralston's the man for him, and yet here we have to stick in a whole bunch of stuff about the new right wing of Lipscot House—with diagrams and illustrations! Who cares twopence about Lipscot House? Burpham thinks

because it belongs to him that makes it exciting for the public!" Mr. Inge champed his jaw, and gave a thick expulsion of his breath. "What if he is a viscount? Dear old British snobbery ain't everything, specially just now. . . ."

"I really ought to be getting to work on Hyman."

"Of course. Smash him. *Personal*. Make 'em sit up. No kid gloves. That's what they like—hot and strong, and sue me for libel if you want to, I don't care a damn. I'd do it myself if I knew enough about Vedantism. You're all right: you do, and you've got the books there by your elbow. But don't be too technical. Be technical in spots, that impresses them—then be slangy and ribald—force of contrast, always takes. But you know. Lots of other things I wanted to talk to you about—never mind—they'll keep. Oh, come in to me again at about eleven-thirty; I shall have this stuff of 'Israfel's' licked into shape by then. He needs the deuce of a lot of doctoring. Learned air, though; no one like him for that; sound, very sound. Between the two of us we'll knock off some prophecies that'll pan out all right, you'll see." He took his pen and unfolded some typewritten sheets. "Something definite and something that'll come off—something about the war. Dear old 'Israfel's' manner and my inspiration—yes."

He wrinkled his forehead, and began to murmur and hum to himself. Lawrance, long impatient, took the opportunity.

"Four pounds at most for that Elemental stuff, and less if possible!" Mr. Inge called after him as he left.

CHAPTER III

IT was one o'clock by the time Lawrance got back to his house for Olga's bracelet. The prospect of the return had been jarring him all the morning: he could not keep his mind off the acute unpleasantness of it; he had writhed in his chair, he had found the greatest difficulty in concentrating upon smashing the pseudo-Vedantism of Mr. Hyman. Luckily it was easy to smash. Mr. Inge, inveterate charlatan himself, had an unerring flair for others of the same breed. When Lawrance had finished his article and was released from the pressure of work of immediate claim, he found it impossible to start on anything. Mr. Inge, immersed in his revisions of "Israfil's" occult predictions, waved him aside at eleven-thirty, and the unexpected diversion of the appearance of "Israfil" himself a little later on came as a huge relief. "Ah, ha! 'None sing so wildly well!'" Inge had called out, as he invariably did, and this time he finished the quotation, with a pause between every word: "'As—the—angel—Ishrafil!'"—a sure sign that he thought his morning's work had gone well and that he was in a good humour.

"Israfil" was unlike any possible angel: a well-worn, hard-bitten, spare, harassed-looking man of about forty, with abundant grey-streaked hair that he brushed straight back from his forehead. His real name was Eugene Titmarsh; and he was a sincere and conscientious astrologist, although he made his living—such living as it

was—entirely out of casting horoscopes and writing about the influences of the planets. He ran one of the astrological almanacks—"Israfel's"—and this brought him in nearly half of his income. He was always in financial straits. On this particular occasion he had come to get a few pounds in advance out of Mr. Inge, and by about half-past twelve he had, after gross embarrassments, partially succeeded.

His appearance gave Lawrance heart. After all, life did not vex him so much as it vexed Titmarsh. That worry of not being able to provide properly for one's children—it must be awful. Lawrance's thoughts reverted to his wife; he remembered how he used to have a grudge against her for not bearing him a child—a grudge that was emphatic about a year ago. Now he was indifferent, more or less: he would have liked the interest of a child, but he recognized more and more the exactions and the complications of a family: the further his observations went, the more he shrank. . . . Still, Muriel might be easier to get on with if she were a mother. The trouble with her—one of the troubles with her—was that she was not occupied enough. Everything she did was so trifling; it was as though she spent her life in perpetually snapping little sticks of raw macaroni. When he came back, she would be about, doing nothing; seeing about some detail of the lunch, and seeing about it very ineffectively—fussing the servants. Her husband's return would at once assume inordinate proportions, she would suspect a hidden motive in it, would think that he had come back on purpose to hurt her feelings, that he had left Olga's present behind on purpose. And of course it did look like a slap in the face—to come back so briefly, for a reason that threw his gift to the girl and the quar-

rel of the evening before into such strong relief, then to go out to his lunch with his friends, leaving her to her solitary meal. Everything would be emphasized in an intensely disagreeable way, and Muriel would co-operate—not exactly wilfully, no; because she couldn't help it—she would co-operate with the emphasis. And she would never see that the emphasis was purely accidental. . . .

Of course, if she had actually taken or hidden the bracelet—well, then she deserved all she would get. She deserved it anyhow! But why should he, Oliver Lawrence, have to suffer as well? He felt himself tied up by the leg, his sense of his own dignity relucted with the result of a sudden swamping of his veins with bad blood and the clamping on him of a ridiculous vicious stubbornness. His lack of humour forbade him the relief usual with most men, while the relief brought by the contemplation of Eugene Titmarsh dropped away from him. He forgot Titmarsh. In his anger that he should be going to have to suffer because of his wife he was almost resolving to go straight on to the Flynns' without Olga's present, but his obstinacy withheld him. No, he would go back home, and he set his ugly thoughts to the paying back of Muriel in her own coin if she were disagreeable. He almost assuaged his personal discomfort with the prospect of a row.

None the less he was immensely relieved to find on his arrival that Muriel was out. He went straight to the diningroom: the package was not to be seen. He searched the sideboard, and the mantelpiece; he looked about on the floor and behind things. Then he searched in his bedroom, equally vainly, all the while growing more and more suspicious of Muriel. She came in just

as he had rung for the servant: from the top of the stairs he saw her, looking pale and tired, holding consciously and rather stiffly erect that sterile figure of hers, as he saw it then, with its ungenerous hips. Lawrance saw her as his sham wife, his pretended fellow,—frozen fast to him, in violation of life,—his congealed mock mate. He was spiritually frostbitten by her.

“I left something behind. I had to come back for it.” He spoke first.

“Oh, have you found it?” she said as the maid appeared.

“No.—Oh, Mary, have you seen a little white cardboard box about anywhere? I think I left it in the diningroom yesterday—or it may have been in my bedroom.”

“No, sir, I haven’t,” the girl told him, with bewildered solicitude.

Lawrance noticed her, with some surprise, as remarkably pretty. She was plump and well rounded, with dark-brown hair curling in chastened abundance from under her white cap; she was rosy and fresh and young and fruitful, her eyes were bright, she had a provoking little interrogative nose; Muriel was a foil to her.

“Oh—well—I expect I shall find it,” he said: thinking resentfully: “I suppose I’m not the sort of man who notices if his servants are attractive.”

“Are you sure you’ve looked carefully?” asked Muriel in a dried-up voice. “I’ll come and look.”

She went upstairs, past the girl, who stood with an uncertain and defenceless air, as though she were in difficulties and hoped that someone would be kind to her. She hesitated about following her mistress, then said: “I’ll look in the diningroom, sir,” and went off. Law-

rance and his wife went into the bedroom together. She began turning things over on his dressingtable.

"I've looked there—thoroughly," he said; and then, with a jerk: "I hope your headache's better."

She opened a drawer. He looked at her, and at his reflection in the mirror, and thought: "What a virtuous pair we are!" Their squalid decency impressed him. He recalled the days of his courtship, of their engagement. How sentimental he had been about her purity, how proud that she had never had any "affairs." He had congratulated himself on that, had read her into his readings of Edward Carpenter's more idealistically romantic passages—"Love's Coming of Age"—he remembered. He had cherished the idea of her as a Miranda, a Perdita. And she might have been, for all he knew. How could he tell, before they were married? These things were badly arranged. . . . Lawrance thought of certain country customs. But hadn't he been a fool, to think that the absence of what people call "carnality" in his love for her meant that the passion was something peculiarly noble and rare, that it would foster his "better nature," and make him "a finer man," and all that? Yes, he had thought of his love for Muriel as "holy." What a prig he must have been about it! Wasn't he a prig still? How little it was that chaste men knew about these things before marriage! What was one to think of morality—abstract morality? And how exactly did actual morality—the real customs of human beings—how did that come in by way of modification? There must be some connection—some connection that people never worked out. Lawrance was woefully at a loss, in his earnest way. He must think this over carefully; things were evidently not as he had supposed—he—

"Don't look so cross, Doll! Great thick eyebrows! I've found it!" Muriel was on her knees by the dressing-table: she held up the cardboard box.

"Oh, have you?" He looked at her with obvious suspicion.

She flushed. "You might say 'thank you'! It was on the floor. You must have knocked it off from the back of your dressing-table."

"I *may* have. Thank you." He held out his hand.

She was nervously playing with the cover of the box. "You never told me what was inside it," she said.

"Do I need to now?"

"Oliver! Do you think I *peeped*?"

"I don't think anything."

"As if I wanted to know!"

"Do give me the thing, please. I shall be awfully late."

She gave it, and walked with rapid steps out of the room. Lawrance wondered if she were more angry than he. Each of them had the power to make the other angrier and more unreasonable—far angrier and far more unreasonable—than any one else could. The *bonds* of matrimony: he reflected for a moment on the word and its implications. He was in his heart uncertain whether or not Muriel had thrown the box behind the dressing-table, whether she had opened it; but he kept forging for himself the conviction that she had, and the conviction answered his demand for a weapon of attack.

CHAPTER IV

LITTLE Marjorie Flynn, a taut brown child, with dark eyes that were nervous to suit her nervous little body, darted out from the Glasden Road house to meet Lawrance. In her shabby and outgrown Navy-blue dress that showed gartered black stockings and gleams of tight-drawn flesh above the knee, she ran to him with jumps and twitters.

“Uncle Lorrie! You’re *late*! You’ve made me hungry!” She flung herself up at him, put both arms round his shoulders, gave him a number of wet and hearty kisses.

“Well, Marjorie!” He put her down, he was embarrassed. “I’m sorry I’m late. Why didn’t you begin?”

“Doris wouldn’t. She said it would be rude. Come along quick.” She dragged him by the hand. “Do you like being with us? You do, don’t you? Everything’s ready, we’ve got roast beef and there’s two bottles of whiskey. Yesterday I fell down and hurt my knee. Look! It bled a lot, and I’ve kept some of the blood, and I’m writing a letter with it to Jimmy. Jimmy’s awfully nice, he’s thirteen; he’s my boy now. He took me to the Pictures last Wednesday, and we held hands all the time. Wasn’t that nice? Rosy Mayhew’s had her father shot at the front; he’s dead; he got the bullet in his head. I wonder if it took his head right off, Uncle Lorrie, do you

think it would have? I asked Rosy, but she didn't know. She and Alec and all of them are in black; they look funny. Should we go all in black if father died? Mr. Deavitt was here yesterday, and he gave me a jigsaw puzzle. He's such a funny man. Doris hates him, but he makes her laugh; she says she hates him all the worse because he makes her laugh, isn't that funny? He carried me with my legs over each of his shoulders. You must carry me that way, it's lovely." She danced, excited, by Lawrance's side. "Do you know what Mr. Deavitt said about Mrs. Lanyon next door? He said she didn't order her dresses by the yard, she ordered them by the acre! He said that's the lady they're sending to the front as cover for the troops. He is funny. I hope he'll come some day when you're here. He says he's going to take me to the 'Coliseum.' He says Olga's 'too big enough' for him. He says his name's 'Archibald.' I always call him 'Archibald.'"

She threw the front door open, and led the way to the diningroom. All the Flynn family was there, the old man and his wife, the two girls Doris and Olga.

"He's come at last!" Marjorie shouted.

Lawrance shook hands all round, apologizing rather gravely for being late. "Many happy returns!" he said to Olga, feeling not quite at ease with her.

Mrs. Flynn disappeared to the kitchen. "Come along and sit down, Lorrie," Mr. Flynn invited him. "You girls, go and help your mother. Not you, Marjorie, you'd be in the way. You stay here." The child immediately sat down on Lawrance's knee. "Well, how's the occult world, eh? When's the war going to end? Why don't you tell us? Set of frauds, you are!"

He laughed extravagantly. His laugh set Lawrance

firm at once on friendly soil. The young man gave his host an obviously affectionate look; he loved that laugh: it rang like a deep bell to summon old memories, memories in which Muriel had no part.

"Inge is going to give you five pounds for that business of Marjorie's, anyhow," he said, surprised by the pleasure it gave him to say it.

"What! A whole blessed fiver!" The old man's lively blue eyes twinkled; there was a slow deepening of his ruddy colour—a ruddiness that seemed to have worn the tissue of his skin as by a deep rubbing in of pigment. "Marj, do you hear that? You shall have a new dress—by Moses, you shall have some new stockings, too; look at your knees." The little girl laughed, and tried to cover the worn thread with her inadequate skirt. "Now we'll have a drink. Of course we will. Come along. Marjie, take your bony legs off Uncle Lorrie's lap. He don't want 'em there, do you, Lorrie? They're too sharp for comfort. We'll give you more milk to drink, out of that fiver."

He walked to the sideboard and took out a bottle of Vermouth. His long lean shanks, in their grey trousers, looked curiously overgrown; they looked like the shanks of a hobbledehoy, they were out of keeping with the years so richly betokened by his liberal white hair and his well-ripened countenance.

"Here we are, Vermouth di Torino." He handed the bottle to Marjorie. "Give that to your uncle Lorrie, with a tumbler." Lawrance poured the liquor. "Siphon!" Mr. Flynn called out, sharpening the edges of the word, "siphon! Marjie, get one from the kitchen. Just a dash of soda. It's pretty good by itself, though. Pretty good, eh?" They sipped. Old Flynn smacked

his purplish lips. "Just a dash of soda, Marj—yes, do it yourself, but be careful about the squirting. We'd cry if you spilt any."

"I say, we must drink to Olga. It's her birthday."

"We will—happy thought. Here they are."

"And here's the soup!" exclaimed Marjorie.

"We're drinking to you, Olga." Lawrance held up his glass. "Good luck!"

He had lost the shyness that he had felt with the girl when he first came in: the idea of the liquor, an idea opportunely timed, dissipated embarrassment. He remembered last night's champagne, which had only oppressed him and tightened his head. "I'm happy now," he thought. His spleen against Muriel kept in the background of the field of his present experience: he liked it to be there, it gave zest to his enjoyment, it made things more interesting, more dramatic. It gave him a sense of irony. He wished Muriel could see him now, drinking to this young girl who was looking so lovely.

Olga's appearance was vibrant and foreign in this shabby English room. She had green eyes,—eyes that were darkened by her deep lashes; her dark hair, shot with seldom russet half-lights, was strangely dense and fine and soft. Her complexion seemed to have been polished to pallor, and her lips, against that pallor, were of a heightened scarlet. Her slenderness was acute, but only ephemerally there for her special hour of youth: every line foretold the change her sex would claim. Lawrance wondered, for the first time, why her figure was so much more girlish than her face. He had never realized this brilliancy, this richness of her. . . . There she was, so suddenly authentic—authentic in her beauty, in her being a girl, and young, and unpossessed.

Her father had been Polish, a Polish dancer; she was a natural child of Mrs. Flynn's. Muriel, when her husband had told her that, had said: "Well, of course you can't possibly expect me to know them, can you?" There she was, then, smiling slightly at him, this Olga, on the sixteenth anniversary of her stained birth.

He went to her and gave her the bracelet in its cardboard box. Her mouth grew grave, she gave him an almost apprehensive shaft from her long eyes, said: "Oh, thank you!" quickly under her breath. She began to untie the string, then she stopped, smiled half-ashamed, and with a nervous tremor of pleasure in her voice, exclaimed: "I don't want to open it now: let me keep it a little, do let me." Her voice was low-pitched, always. She put her hand on his shoulder. "You won't mind, will you?"

"Oh, Olga!" Marjorie addressed her sister in the tone of a child imitating the reprimands of its elders. "What a shame! I want to see it; I want to see it now."

"Well, you can't, Marjorie," Lawrance laughed at her.

"Sit down to your dinner, Marj." Old Flynn settled himself into his place at the head of the table. "Bless the dear ladies! Praise them and magnify them forever!"

"I want to *see*!"

"Marjorie, sit down, dear." Mrs. Flynn's tone was unchallengeably final: the child obeyed her mother's collected and gauged command.

"Of course we mustn't see," said blonde plump Doris in her musical comedy voice. "Olga's said so. She doesn't want to open it now. She must keep it a little longer."

Doris tried to pitch her words on a low note, in

mimicry of her sister. Olga paid no attention, she looked quite abstracted, she was frowning slightly as though at something that came to her from a very long way off.

"Cheer up, kiddie!" Doris winked a babyish blue eye at her. "Cheer up, it's your birthday!"

"Why don't you give Uncle Lorrie a kiss?" Marjorie called out shrilly. "You must give a kiss when you get a present."

"Saucy little hound!" cried Doris. "Shut it!"

Olga kissed Lawrance before he realized it, with lips that were cool and light. Her pallor was not even faintly tinged, nor did he colour. They all sat down, and began their soup. Lawrance had Olga and Doris to either side of him.

Doris and Marjorie between them did nearly all the talking, and more or less simultaneously.

"Well, you *did* crib that from Mr. Deavitt," insisted Marjorie. "That's what he says: 'Saucy little hound!' He calls every girl 'Mordie,' Uncle Lorrie, and every boy 'Georgie.' He calls Mrs. Lanyon 'Mordie Lanyon.' Doesn't that sound funny? I do like him—because he's so silly! He said to Jimmy: 'You're too pretty for a boy, you ought to have been a pig!'" She went on twittering at high pitch between mouthfuls of soup. "Doris is a copy-cat. She cribs things out of those pieces at the theatre, too, she—"

"Mr. Fisher's given me a part in 'The Runaway Girl' that's going on tour this summer. It's a speaking part, too. Four pounds a week. Not half bad, Mr. Lawrance, is it? We begin rehearsals next week."

"She used to hate Mr. Fisher. Mr. Fisher told Edie Newman Doris was a soapy kid! Mr. Deavitt said—"

"Oh, shut it, silly little owl, you and your Mr. Deavitt!"

"He said: 'It's the wrong, wrong way to tickle Mary!' "

"She can't talk of anything but Mr. Deavitt. She's got that Mr. Deavitt on her brain! She's dotty about Mr. Deavitt!"

"I got five pounds for those animal things I saw in my bedroom!"

"Yes, you would see snakes, Marj. Did you really get her five pounds, Mr. Lawrance? How awfully good of you!" Doris put on her Society air.

"I'm going to have a new dress and a new pair of stockings!"

The chatter continued.

Mrs. Flynn was carving the beef. Her presence gradually emerged, she became noticeable, more and more,—even noteworthy. Lawrance reflected, in and out of the incessant patters and trills of the girls' talk, upon the admirable quality of this woman's silence, upon the power she gave it of spelling her out, so emphatically and so without the obtrusion of a silence that is conscious and forced. Wonderful, the way she impressed herself without a word, without even motions or looks that could be called "characteristic." Lawrance felt that he really loved her, there was no one else who could give him the same sense of ease and security, not even old Flynn, for the "Mariner," as Lawrance called him, had his uncertain and even fretful moods. He could not escape every penalty of his Irish blood. Lawrance saw him looking at his wife from across the table, with an expression of permeating content. Devoted to her: Lawrance was well aware, and now rather jealously aware, of that. How

ugly Mrs. Flynn was, grotesquely ugly, you might say, with her scanty black hair showing uneven grey streaks, hair drawn tightly behind her ears and above her lined forehead, into plaits that looked as though they had been there for decades. Then, her misshapen prominent nose, her asymmetrical mouth, and, over heavy pouches, her round brown eyes that bulged out to what seemed at first so incongruous a company with the rest of her face.

But Lawrance could be happy, he felt, looking at her for hours together. He would like always to have her about. Though he had known her for nine years, each meeting with her had a freshness. Always at first he found himself ignoring her, noticing the others: always she impressed him, surprised him, later on. Her eyes comforted him immensely; they had a withdrawn light of humorous friendliness—really humorous: of the humour that puts everything in its natural place, that allows for its being there, and understands. Her eyes were what mattered, it was her eyes that were herself: utterly free from guile, and setting upon everything the seal of their freedom. They had a rare and remote roguishness, a roguishness of baffling implication. With those eyes, when she was younger, there must have been reason enough for the Polish dancer's romance, and for others. Her strange and challenging passiveness, overlying power, must have made all possible sex amends for her in her youth. She seemed to rest all the while in wait, in an amicable ambush, where she chose to be for the untroubled reception of what might pass: yet she was ready to raise a withholding hand, on an easy and infallible dignity, when the time came. She was in a chosen backwater, yet she knew the hour of every current, and its strength. Blonde pretty Doris, that "soapy kid," lath-

ered in bubbly flux from a limply-squeezed sponge of emotion, all her feelings at a haphazard smear about her, threw her mother's moulded surety into high relief. Lawrance looked at Mrs. Flynn with an open admiration, impressed anew by her complete unrivalled conquest, in adaptation, of physical handicaps: by that articulation of dignity with a frame so round and tight!

Marjorie, eating her beef, had now short intervals of silence. Doris addressed herself mainly to the young man: she liked him, because he was dark and tall, with a hard well-strung body. She liked his thick eyebrows, and his hot stressed underlip. She was extremely jealous of Olga, whom she knew Lawrance preferred, though she told herself that really he couldn't, because Olga was "slow" and "soft," and she, Doris, was smart, she knew how to talk to men; they thought her clever and good form, she was the style for them, she had had practice. Olga never talked to any one, she just looked, she was a stick, she couldn't be any form at all for anybody. And she was a conceited little cat.

"Isn't it lovely," Doris was saying, "that Uncle Tofty and Uncle Lance have both skedaddled off to-day?" The two men referred to were boarders of some years' standing at the Flynn's. "Uncle Tofty's gone for the weekend to Portsea, and Uncle Lance is spending the day with his cousins at Acton. Wasn't that lucky for Olga's birthday and you coming?— Oh, I liked that *Occultists' Magazine* you left here last time, Mr. Lawrance. I thought it was awfully interesting, that part about the lines on the hand. What was it called? 'Cheiro' something, wasn't it?"

"Oh, yes. 'Some Variations of Cheiromantic Reading.' Glad it amused you."

"I thought it was awfully clever. Did you write it?"

"Yes, I wrote that."

"Do you know about the lines on the hand, Uncle Lorrie? I didn't know you knew. Do tell mine. Shut up, Doris, my mouth isn't full now. There was an old woman on the Pier at Brighton last summer and she told Olga she was going to be married at seventeen and have three babies, two girls and then a boy. That was nice, wasn't it? I'd like to be an aunt. They put that old woman in prison, they said she—"

"Well, I shouldn't be surprised if they put me in prison, Marjorie. I quite deserve it. Old Inge and I ought to share a cell."

"Not a bit of it, my boy." The Mariner poured a long draught of whiskey and water down his lean throat. Lawrance watched the machine-like movements of the Adam's apple that made so much ado in its confinement of withered skin, he noticed the exposed workings of the sharp projecting bones to either side, bones that were of an antique springiness, flexible and frangible at the same time. "Not a bit of it! You're all right! What would the ladies do without fortune-telling, eh, tell me that? These damned Puritans want to take all our pleasures away. 'Obtaining money under false pretences,' is it? What I say is that no one ever obtained money under false pretences who gave pleasure for ut! What do you think, Patsey, my girl?" He looked across to his wife with a glance of affection so unexpectedly keen that Lawrance winced.

Mrs. Flynn's eyes revolved and brightened. "You know I don't want to send Lorrie to prison."

"Oh, Mr. Lawrance!" Doris cried with innocent eager-

ness, clasping his arm. "Do tell our hands afterwards, Mr. Lawrance!"

"Yes, do, Uncle Lorrie—do!" Marjorie held out both her thin little long brown hands; she jumped in her chair. "Why do you always call him 'Mr. Lawrance,' Doris? It's so silly! Olga doesn't."

"Saucy little Madam!"

"Do you want me to tell your fortune, Olga?"

The girl didn't answer.

"Dreaming as usual, Olga!" Doris cried out. "Do wake up. She never says anything all mealtimes, only 'Yes' and 'No' and 'Please' and 'Thank you.' She ought to go into a Convent!"

Olga started and frowned, with delicate little lines all over her white forehead. "I'm sorry," she said, and looked round, vexed and bewildered.

"Well, and why shouldn't she dream if she wants to? You're all right, Olga darling, you're all right. I don't talk if I don't want to, why should you? You agree, Patsey, don't you?" The old man reached for the bottle. "When we've whiskey we talk or we don't talk, and it all comes easy. Pass the water, Marj. Lorrie, fill up."

Lawrance did so. It was a noble Irish whiskey, well born and well bred, a whiskey of ripe essence, potent and smooth, a whiskey for drinkers of well-determined heads and spirits amply girt. A whiskey that soda would have outraged. Both Lawrance and the Mariner had the experienced right way with their glass: they advanced, in the right slow dear measure, from the terms of acquaintance to the terms of intimacy. They had the freemasonry of perfect bottlemen's manners. Lawrance noted, with a rush of really exquisite pleasure, the presence of a second bottle, with its enchanting yellow label,

on that clipped and tarnished sideboard. They would come, at a later hour, to that second bottle, on terms with it of instant friendship, a friendship of private relish.

Ah! a whiskey of parts: they took, in unison, considerate mouthfuls.

"I don't care about whiskey," said Doris. "What I like is a nice glass of Port wine."

"You shall have it, my dear!" The Mariner raised his voice to a jocund falsetto. "It's Olga's birthday. Marjie'll go round to the corner and get you a bottle afterwards."

"What wine do you like, Olga?" Lawrance turned to her rather abruptly, and the girl started again.

"Oh, I don't know. We had some light sparkling wine once—Sparkling Moselle, it was. I liked that. Sparkling Burgundy's nice, too."

"Good idea." Mr. Flynn gave her a philanthropic look. "Excellent idea. It's your birthday, Olga darling, and you shall have Sparkling Burgundy. Can't have Moselle—German wine, can't have that. What I say, my dear, is, go out and get it afterwards and have it for supper. Lorrie and I'll stick to whiskey, though, what do you say, Lorrie? You'll stay to supper, of course? Sparkling Burgundy, Marj, get it at the corner."

"What does that big lump under my thumb mean, Mr. Lawrance?" Doris asked him with her sudden innocent curiosity.

"Oh, that!" The young man took her hand and squeezed the plump ball of flesh. "That's the Mount of Venus."

"Oh!" She flushed and brightened. "What does that mean?"

"It means you're fond of flirtations."

"Oh, Mr. Lawrance, I'm not a bit!"

He let her hand go: her disappointment did not escape Marjorie, whose bird-like eyes kept darting everywhere.

"Doris likes you holding her hand!" she shamelessly exclaimed. "She likes men to hold her hand! Don't you, Dorrie!"

"Mar-jor-ie!"

"Well, what was I telling you?" Lawrance laughed.

Olga's hand was on the table by him: he took it. The fingers were flexible and rather moist—a white hand, with resilient bones that seemed as though they might be easily crushed. Strange, that they should be bones, as the Mariner's were . . . bones of age and youth. . . . But Lawrance had no sinister thoughts.

"You see, Olga's Mount of Venus is nothing to yours, Doris; but she beats you on the Girdle."

"What's the Girdle?" Doris asked suspiciously.

"The Girdle of Venus. Just above the heart-line. Do you see, Olga's goes right round from the forefinger nearly to the little finger. That's very unusual. It's a good deal broken: there in the middle it joins the line of heart."

"What does it mean?" Doris asked eagerly now, hoping for some point of vantage upon her sister.

"Oh, it may mean a lot of things! It means that she'll be in love quite differently from you."

"Has she been in love already?"

"No." Lawrance was decisive. "But you have, Doris, you know you have, scores of times."

"Oh!" Doris attempted dignity. "I'm not so sure about that!"

"I'm in love with Jimmy!" cried Marjorie. "And

Mr. Deavitt's in love with me! Do look at my hand!" She stretched it out.

"What I say,"—the Mariner stuck his knife into a piece of cheese—"what I say is, if you can make people happy, well, why not? If a girl can give pleasure, why shouldn't she do it? The worst kind of a girl is a girl that doesn't. She goes rotten inside. *Always*. You agree with me, Patsey?"

"I don't think," said Olga slowly, "I don't think I can give any one pleasure. I wish I could."

"*Olga!* What a way to talk!" Doris half giggled.

Lawrance had not let Olga's hand go. Their fingers grew warm together; suddenly hers twitched and pressed his. Simply nervousness, perhaps? He wondered. Of course she was nervous, nervous and shy. Her palms were intersected with little broken criss-cross lines. He looked at the others. Mrs. Flynn's round brown eye included him in a special dispensation of the benignity of its undersurface smile; Doris, fidgety and piqued, was scolding Marjorie as though it were her duty, with a pretence of preoccupation. She had turned away from Lawrance, stressing her tact in ignoring that his hand lay with Olga's. Marjorie tossed her head and left the table, throwing herself for a moment at full length upon the horsehair sofa: it escaped Lawrance that there was something curiously engaging about the illusion of abnormal length that this posture gave to the little girl's form. She returned to her place with an air of caprice. The old man seemed at that moment apart from and independent of them all: he chuckled lightly, embraced by his jolly angels; he rubbed his hands softly together, set his pleased gaze to a point through and past the vision of the others. Lawrance had an anxious curiosity

for the thoughts of Olga: her look told him nothing, except that she had thoughts and was baffled by them. He noted again that little teased delicate frown of hers, that frown that seemed suddenly to have become so familiar. He thought of Muriel, whom he saw clearly for a moment, incongruous and intrusive here. The vision made him more friendly to his companions, more unfriendly to her.

CHAPTER V

THE Mariner had a recognized claim on Lawrance for an hour or so after any meal in his house. "Now for our little time together, Lorrie, what do you think?" the old man would say. The convention was so well established that even Marjorie never protested. Lawrance's enjoyment of these hours was as a rule no less than his companion's: but on this occasion he felt a reluctance, an impatience, that not even the tender insinuations of that Irish whiskey could altogether soothe.

It was the first time that he had been with Olga since his definite knowledge that his wife was jealous of her. The girl excited his interest now, but not, so he made it out, his senses. No, it was not a physical compulsion that he felt to her, he assured himself of that: but he wanted to find out about her, he wanted the real intimacy of friendship, not the sham intimacy of passion. He wanted to read her innocence and her charms as one reads a book: any love affair would obscure the pages. She did not want it, either, he was sure; she never had wanted it, any more than he: love affairs were not in place for her. She was too subtle and slow in her growth for them yet. And Lawrance's pride forbade him a vulgar expected co-operation with Muriel's suspicion: further, and more importantly, he tended towards a relation with the girl that should be peculiarly their own, that should have nothing in common, nothing even super-

ficially in common, with any relation that he had had with his wife. He wanted to swing clear from Muriel in this, and whether his intention justified her jealousy the more or the less he did not allow to concern him. He aimed instinctively at the wider estrangement that came of not being concerned.

Old Flynn, as soon as his wife and the girls had gone, uncorked the second bottle of whiskey.

“Not quite ready for it yet,” he said, “but I like to see it ready for us. Ah, my dear old boy, we like to see it *ready* for us, don’t we?” He placed it between them, then took his old black meerschaum out of its case that lay always in a corner of the mantelpiece, filled it by sweet degrees, lit it and blew lavish clouds. “Pity you don’t smoke, Lorrie. Thank the Lord, you drink, though. That fellow who was round here yesterday—Deavitt—Crockerton Deavitt—he don’t either smoke or drink. Jumpy sort of chap, big bulgy blue eyes and a big yellow moustache. Not enough flesh on him, what he wants is Port wine. Doesn’t do for a grown man to drink only milk and tea and cocoa. Blood thins out. He’s an entertaining cuss, though, and plays a fair hand at whist and ‘hearts.’ But I tell you, my boy, if a man don’t drink, there’s something wrong somewhere. A modest wash-down with his meals, and a good hearty stand-to-ut when he gets with a friend once in a while. And to hell with the secret drinkers, damn all the alcoholics, I say; they don’t understand. Subjects for the physician, poor devils! But every god worth worshipping has to have his victims, it’s all in the game, ain’t it? What do you say?”

“Your religion’s as sound as a bell!” Lawrance finished his glass. He continued to think of Olga. The

sway of Dionysus was disputed within him; but he paid lipservice by filling up again.

"We've the best of it these days, we octogenarians. No fighting for us. I tell you, Lorrie, I tell you—" The Mariner stopped and took a draught, of slow and lovely percolation. "Ah . . . I tell you, when you hear a striding old fellow with the big voice, when you hear him say: 'Lucky young chaps! Wish I was young enough to go too,' well, don't you believe him! Bluff, that's what it is, bluff. They know when they're well off, right enough, with their beds and their victuals and their armchairs and their newspapers on their breakfast-tables of a morning! Don't you believe 'em! Never was such a snug time for the old. But, Jove! a young chap like you is the best off of all, Lorrie! Heart that'll last your time, but'd crock up on a march in a twinkling!"

"Yes." Lawrance recalled his wandering thoughts. "I suppose I should have to go if it weren't for my heart. . . ."

"Not that I'm against war, mind you,—not a bit of it. Just look at the people who are; just think of them; set of lousy rats, lousy. Damned teetotal crew. Never was an honest drinker yet who was a Pacifist. Never. I tell you the two things go together. I tell you what, Lorrie: take the opinion of a man who doesn't drink, and then believe the dead opposite. Sure to be right— No, when we get war, we want it. They'll go on longer than they need, of course; these things aren't made to tailor's measure—but we wanted it, had to have it. Shambles, yes, sort of lyric shambles—better for it—don't you believe—" He trailed inaudibly off, as he relit his meerschaum.

"Well, we were right to come into this war, anyhow."

"Right! Right?" The old man wagged his head from side to side, to get a better draught for his pipe. "Right don't matter. We'd have been just as much right if we'd been wrong. If you'd been asea as much as I have, you'd know. Cant gets blown off the decks, my word on it—blown off—even if it is only the Merchant Service— Well,—you've got your luck, I've got mine, and I'm sticking to it. A long life—I'm safe on that, Lorrie; I've *had* it: that's another way in which we old chaps score, ever occur to you?—good health and a stomach for drink, thank the Lord, and my Patsey. Holy Mary bless her for the best woman in the world! A good woman, and these girls come with her, and what does it matter if they're not my own? You don't think of that, not with a woman like Patsey."

"Yes, you're well off, all right, Mariner. You're to be envied. I wish more women were like Patsey."

"Of course I don't deny we'd rather have that Tofty chap and that Lance chap out of the house. They're in the way—rather not have 'em about. Pretty good fellows, but only pretty good. Still, you can't have everything; we need the money. Couldn't get along without it. Well, that's not much."

He drank again, and so did Lawrance, but without the other's release of mind. Lawrance found himself resisting the liquor's happy advance: he wanted to be free for Olga; he wanted his normal state for her.

"What's going to happen to-night?" he asked suddenly. "How about my taking Olga to some show in town for her birthday?"

The Mariner nodded indulgently from his peaceful heights. "She's a child yet, Olga is," he meditated.

“Child yet. Girls are different. Doris now, when she was only fourteen—quite different to Olga— But people fuss too much about sex, they always have. What I say is, a man should take it clean and straight, as he takes his liquor. Clean and straight— I’ll tell you something, my boy; I wouldn’t tell everybody.” He paused, and finished his tumbler. “I don’t like the Irish.”

Lawrance knew what was coming. His anticipation of the so habitual sequel was warm and pleasant to him. He began to be less occupied with Olga. He gave his whiskey to a more confederate palate. Why, the first evening they ever drank together, that evening when Bassett, the man who used to be on the *Oxford Telegraph* and then went off to British Columbia, had “trotted him round,” as he put it, “to see a queer old fish I know up in North London”—at that very first meeting the Mariner had talked about the Irish. So much the better— The second year at Oxford, wasn’t it?

“I don’t like the Irish. I hate them. My father was half Irish, but thank God for it, he married a Welsh-woman, and his mother was English all through—North-country. I hate the Irish and all their damned ways. They’re a slave race; they’re bullies and cads and slaves; there never was an Irish gentleman yet, and there never will be! Home Rule for ’em! They want a Russian government; they want Peter the Great and the knout,—Ulster as well! A quarrelsome, treacherous, underhanded, lewd-chaste set of swine!”

Lawrance laughed. He was almost as happy as the old man with this familiar invective. It soothed and cheered and diverted him, this jolly malice. It was a free explosion of extravagant vigour: sign of a robust

emotional animus, without rancour's thin edge. A diatribe of red corpuscles, unjaundiced altogether.

"I see you believe in indictments of nations."

"And I do. It was some damned politician said you couldn't. Some one who didn't know the Irish; no politician does, whether he's Irish or not. I've seen enough of 'em in Ireland and in America— Must be something wrong with America: hundred millions—is it?—and not a dozen decent cellars among the lot of 'em!— They say an Irishman always gets on outside his own country; so he does; he gets on the top and stinks there. He can't get on in Ireland because he's made the whole country stink with him— English oppression! Stuff and nonsense! They whine about English oppression; look at their faces, then you'll understand. What they want is old Oliver back again—that's a name for you; be proud you have it, boy; proud you have it; Lord! my name's Michael—'Michael'!— They want a Cromwell to say to 'em: 'Now, you be decent, you curs, or we'll smash you to pieces!' They're dangerous dogs; they've poisoned teeth. Don't tell me there's no sedition over there now— Their whiskey's the only good thing they have, that and their porter: but they drink worse than Germans, too; drink themselves into a worse damnation than they're in when they're sober. As for religion, they aren't Catholics: they're a disgrace and a blight to the Faith; they're a blasphemy! They weren't worthy of it; they corrupted it; they turned it to rot! Mother of God! Look at the Latin countries! They'd kick the Irish priests into their cess-pools there. Thank God for it, I'm a Catholic of Spain. Born and baptized in Toledo. Patsey and Olga are Catholics of Russia. Priests in Ireland take the girls

and boys and drive the sexuality back into their blood and let it fester! It's Puritanism ranker and more morbid—putrified by the lewd prying priest! It's a thing that hasn't happened in any other country in the world; it couldn't happen. They've no love-songs in Ireland; all their love-songs have the fear of Hell before 'em; they're thin as dillwater. They talk of Irish poetry! It's the poetry of thin souls that have been weak enough to be whipped out of their bodies. The Gaelic School! Puh! It's wails and snivels and me and my baby, we're unhappy; listen to my dreams and give me tuppence!—For God's sake, Lorrie, let's get to that other bottle!"

He went on, with freer and freer flux of speech, gave final damnation to the Irish, mellowing each acrid word, passed from them to some talk of his travels in British East Africa—"British East," he called it—and then debouched abruptly to the subject of genius.

"All it comes to, Lorrie," he told him, "is that they go straight at things, and other people go crooked. They're lots more of 'em about than we ever hear of, but only one in a thousand happens to get switched on to painting or writing or that kind of a job. A good doctor's the best judge of genius going—a good surgeon better still. I'd take a surgeon's opinion on a book a long way before a critic's. They know. You can't fool them. They know if a chap goes straight. Women are the worst judges of all—born to go sideways, like crabs. If a book pleases a woman, it's damned forever. Women's souls move sideways."

"Yes, I believe that." Lawrance spoke warmly, thinking of Muriel.

He looked at the old man with a deepening affection; he felt himself spiritually enfolded with him, the bond

between them lay set and signed and sealed. It was of the Mariner, he thought, that Muriel should be jealous: yes, she should be jealous of this union that was as real as theirs was sham. Lawrance fed his heart on the old man's voice; the sound was that of a ritual enforced and endeared by often repetition, and the actual words no less, for Lawrance had heard them before, over and over: they held him in a firmer clasp for that. He needed their sense no more than a devotee needs the sense of the words of the Mass.

The room, as the young man looked round it, seemed a temple dedicated to the Mariner's self. Lawrance's slowly-shifting gaze embraced devotedly the stained clipped sideboard, the worn horsehair sofa and chairs, the long deal table with its green cloth torn and frayed, the heavy gas-chandelier over it, the red excoriated old carpet underneath, the pictures of ships on the faded brown walls, the engraving of "Boston Harbor, 1876," ugly and dirty, a pious and patient vindication of the past. And it was all this that Muriel grudged him! But he forgot Muriel, he forgot Olga, as the old man's voice went on.

CHAPTER VI

THE whiskey of the second bottle had receded some two inches below the top of the yellow label when Mrs. Flynn came in to them.

"Do you want any tea?" she asked.

"Tea, Patsey, tea?" The old man shook his head. "Come and sit with us. I know what you'd like. Glass of milk and a drop, eh? Come along."

"Yes, come on, my dear, and I'll fetch the milk." Lawrance got up to go to the kitchen. "Yes, I will. I want to."

He noticed that Mrs. Flynn looked tired, though her eyes smiled still. He took her by the arm and put her into a chair by the Mariner's side.

The kitchen door was open, and Doris's voice was plainly heard as Lawrance left the dining-room.

"And you needn't tell me you didn't like holding hands with him! I saw you, the way you looked!"

"Yes, I did like his holding me—"

"Holding *you*! What do you mean? He wasn't holding you; he was holding your hand. I'd be ashamed. Oh, you're the nice good qui-ert girl, you are. Butter wouldn't melt in your mouth, I *don't* think! I wouldn't like to look the way you do—it's horrid!"

"How do I look?"

"You know how you look. You— Oh, Mr. Lawrance! You gave me quite a turn. We've washed up all the things, and we're getting ready for supper."

"Oh. I'm afraid you've a lot to do."

He looked at Olga, who stood pressed back against the dresser, as though she had been forced into that position for defence. She supported herself by her hands that had been swollen and blanched, slightly, by the hot water; her childlike body was bent a little back. Lawrence noticed his bracelet on her wrist. She caught his eye.

"I do like it!" she said, holding her arm up to him. She straightened herself. "I went upstairs and took it out and put it on in my bedroom." Doris gave her a quick reproaching glance. "It's lovely."

She made an uncertain step towards him, and Lawrence put his arms out to her, and lifted her off her feet. How light she was! He kissed her cheek.

"Well, I'm glad you like it!"

"We must get along with that supper," said Doris, in a cold tone of necessary preoccupation, a tone that was busy and detached. "I'm going out with Fred Bovey to the Pictures to-night."

"Well, Olga, you'll come with me, then. We'll have a birthday party together. We'll go to the 'Trafalgar.' Manon Gauffroux's singing there to-night; she's splendid; you'll like her. Do you think we can have supper at half-past six, Doris? Good Lord, it's nearly six o'clock now!"

Marjorie ran in, hugging a bottle of Sparkling Burgundy.

"I got it!" she cried. "Mr. Cramer said that as it was me it'd be only three and nine. It's good, too. I saw Fred Bovey; he won't take me to the Pictures to-night; he said one at a time was enough. What are you going to do after supper, Uncle Lorrie?"

"He's taking Olga to the 'Tráf.' Don't bother, Marj." Doris spoke in a schoolteacher tone.

"Oo-er!" The little girl fell to extreme gravity. "Mr. Deavitt's taking me to the 'Coliseum.' "

"Look here, Marjorie; hold out your hand and see what you'll get!" Lawrance took out his sovereign-case. "Hold it out straight! There's one!" He put a half-sovereign into her palm. "And two—three—four—"

"Hold your hand still, Marjorie."

"Don't scream, Marj! What a soft kid you are!"

"Eight, nine, and ten! There!"

"Oh, they are pretty! Thank you awfully, and fancy, each of them's worth ten shillings, isn't it! Thank you awfully!" She threw one arm round him: her little brown hand was crowded with the coins; she clenched it and held it stiffly at arm's length.

"Don't thank me. Thank your black devils. That isn't my money."

"Whose is it?"

"It belonged to the people who are going to put your photograph in the magazine."

"Oh, yes! I'm going to have my photograph taken when I get my new frock and my new stockings. I'm not ugly, Uncle Lorrie, am I? Jimmy's brother—he's fifteen—he said to Jimmy: 'I wouldn't be seen dead with that ugly kid,' and the other day he called me 'Facey'! Cheek! He said: 'Here comes the living skellington, twopence admission, ladies and gents!' he said. Saucy young owl!"

"Oh, he's jealous, Marjorie, that's what's the matter with him."

"He called me monkey-face, and said they wanted me

round at their house to crack nuts. I'll look nice in my new frock, though, Uncle Lorrie, won't I? Don't you think I'll look nice?"

"Goodnight! The kid might be twenty, the way she goes on about her blessed looks! It's about time you put on your China silk decolletay for dinner at the Carlton! How old are you, Marj? I don't know what's coming over the kids these days. When I was ten I didn't think of anything but dolls and sweets. I didn't think of the way I looked! Why, Marjie's more set on herself than me or Olga!"

"Get *on*, old Doris. Who's got red paint on her lips, oo-er? Fred Bovey got it all over his *mouf* the other night, and his cheeks all over powder, oo-er!"

"Shut up, young Marjorie! It isn't true, Mr. Lawrance."

"He did look a sight!"

"Spiteful little cat, you are!"

"Olga doesn't put anything on. Olga never kisses any one, only Uncle Lorrie!"

"Oh, yes, Miss Know-it-all! Go up top, smart Jane!"

"Well, she doesn't!"

"You're a fair nosey, you are, to beat the band!"

"Give me a glass of milk for your mother, Doris."

Lawrance had been giving Olga thoughtful looks. She was sitting along the ledge of the dresser, with her brownish-green skirt crinkled to her knees, about which there showed an uneven fringe of crumpled white petticoat. Her black-stockinged legs, from her knees, dropped lightly over the wooden edge. She had taken a red paper-covered book from the dresser, and was reading it, with her head bent forward and her cheeks caressed by her dark fine hair.

"Can't you sit nicely, Olga?" said Doris severely, as she gave Lawrance the milk.

Olga gave her skirt a little pull, without looking up. Her pallor was undisturbed. Lawrance glanced at her book, and saw that it was a story by Paul de Kock, picked up, no doubt, by the Mariner, who let the girls read anything. What was she making of that book? Her expression told him nothing. He went with his milk, Marjorie jumping by his side, her right hand still firmly and possessively clenched.

CHAPTER VII

“**L**ET’S walk to the Tube, Olga, shall we?”

The girl took Lawrance’s arm. She looked two or three years older now; her figure was concealed by a dusky-red coat, a coat of heavy stuff, coming to just below her knees. She had a close-fitting green velvet cap, and her long hair seemed to be poured out from it as from a goblet. She seemed a girl of two or three generations back; she suggested a photograph in an old Album or an illustration out of a magazine of the ’seventies. Lawrance began to be freshly puzzled about her as they walked down the Glasden Road. He associated her with some Scandinavian country,—Norway or Sweden—some country of keen long frosts, of sports in the snow. She was not abstracted now: her green clear eyes had an immediate light; she walked quickly, rather nervously; her pressure on his arm had conscious life, life of an eager and uncertain flow.

“I like this birthday, Uncle Lorrie,” she said.

“So do I. But don’t call me ‘*Uncle Lorrie*.’ I don’t want to be an uncle! You can’t talk to uncles. I want you to talk to me, to tell me things about yourself: you know—not as if I were older—”

“Oh, I don’t like people who aren’t older. I never can talk to them— They don’t like me, either. If I do say anything, they laugh.”

“That’s only because they’re stupid. I’m not stupid that way, Olga,—really—”

"It's hard to talk to people, too, if you've always known them. They think you stay the same." She frowned. "Father and mother are like that. Everything seems to stay the same with them. I don't know why, because everything really gets different, doesn't it? Almost every day it gets different—somehow or other—you can't keep up with it. I can't. And nobody else seems to be interested."

"When did things begin to be different?"

"About two years ago—"

"Do tell me about it, Olga!"

He pressed her arm. He wanted to bring in every sense to the communication between them, while winnowing the flesh of all but the finer grain of sympathy: he wanted the finest possible touch, the only touch that could bare and thrill all that she was. Yet he knew that the girl's looks were tremendously important to him: her pallor, her eyes like river-water under trees, her sudden red lips, her frown that was so much her own, the lines of her transient figure that he guessed at now, it was all so *necessary*! His sympathy with her took in not only her physical self, but even her clothes: he saw the little close velvet cap, and thought of the line it would leave in her hair, of the difference, when she took it off, between the hair that had been imprisoned and the hair that had been free. No, he could never forget that she was a girl, it was the friendship of her, being a girl, that he longed for: a friendship physically involved, but not physically dominated . . . a friendship that demanded her looks, but not her embraces. He could anticipate only vaguely: this was something he never had had.

He waited for the answer that she did not give him.

at once. But she slackened her pace; he could feel that she was thinking, remembering.

"Oh, I don't know!" she said at last. "Or it isn't really that I don't know, but when I think of the words for it, they seem to mean something quite different— It was in the spring, and we were in the country, and all the trees, and the sky, and the roads and the fields, and the houses, too, seemed to be suddenly quite new; they were alive and they felt, and I liked them very much; I loved them—but that doesn't say what it was! Words don't do much, do they?"

"How about poetry?"

"No, it doesn't, quite—not for me. I mean that the poetry I've read belongs to some one else; I don't feel that it's for me. I used to read a lot of it—Shelley and Keats; I read nearly all of them, but it wasn't really—or they said it in a way I couldn't understand. Of course it's—it's beautiful. But music is better; that's more like what I feel. And—I don't know—it sounds silly, but there's something about flowers. It's the same with—well, with the weather, and some people who are nice to look at. They're—well, they're *there*, they're themselves, you see, and poetry and music are only things made up about the other things that really do mean—" She stopped suddenly, and gave him one of her apprehensive glances. "It's silly to talk," she said. "It spoils things."

"It doesn't, Olga dear; it makes them awfully interesting. I want you to talk— Look here, don't let's go by Tube; let's take this cab. It'll be much nicer." He hailed it.

When they were inside he took her gloved hand, which she took away from him. Her face was grave: gravely

she removed the glove and gave him her bare hand. He held it lightly. It seemed alive with her.

"Oh, Olga!" he said strugglingly. "I do like you!"

"I thought so." She smiled with pleasure: her teeth were small; they looked peculiarly brittle. "I thought you did like me to-day. That was nicer than the bracelet!"

"It's nicer than anything, to me, your feeling that it was!" Lawrance paled with excitement.

"You're the only one that does like me, I think. Father and mother do, of course, but they would anyhow."

"Do you mind that? Do you mind not being liked by these boys and girls?"

"No. I don't exactly mind not being liked. I think I mind my not liking them. I mind their being all the same as each other; I mind their seeming all the same to me, because they can't be really, can they? Doris was different when she was little, but she isn't different at all now. I like some of the very little girls and boys; even when they're alike, they're alike in a nice way. I like Marjorie sometimes. I don't *dislike* the older ones, you know. I only don't like them. But some of them dislike me. You can tell by the way they look, and the things they say."

"You haven't any boy friends at all, then, Olga?"

"No, but I like boys better; they're shy, some of them are. You know what I mean: you feel there's something they don't show; it's—mysterious; it's something like dreams. It's something that has a meaning; something that"—she frowned—"well, it seems to be something that won't stay the same, and yet in a way it does, because it reminds you of some time hundreds of years ago, and hundreds of years later on, too— It's like

dreams. It's something that we're inside of—in a way."

"You feel like this about *all* the boys?"

"Yes, unless they're ugly."

"Do go on telling me about it, Olga. It's tremendously interesting."

"But I can't tell you—not properly. I can think it, but thoughts don't go in words, do they? You can think anything—almost—but it won't get into words. Why don't you tell me? Words are much easier for you."

"Good heavens! They aren't!" Lawrance thought of the kind of things he wrote in his articles and reviews. "I can't say anything—and I don't feel anything worth saying. I wish I did. I suppose I did once, but I've forgotten. Mind you don't forget!— But there isn't any particular boy, Olga, is there, who makes you feel like this—more than another?"

"No. I suppose I should be in love with him, shouldn't I, if there were? But, Uncle Lorrie—"

"'Uncle' again!"

"I don't feel that I come into it—not myself, I mean. I suppose if you're in love it's all you and the other person and no one else, isn't it? I don't think Doris is ever in love, not really. She isn't happy. I'm sorry about Doris."

"I don't think Doris is very nice to you."

"I don't mind the things she says. I wish she would be really in love. She doesn't ever look as if she was. She's the same as the others. They all have their boys; sometimes they change about, and that means it was a mistake, doesn't it?— Doris changes about a lot. There's one girl, Herga Ashdon, they all say she's—they say she's the limit, but I don't mind it with her, somehow. It seems all right; it seems the way she was

meant to— She's different, and she's happy. Perhaps Marjorie will be like that. But there's something wrong about the others, I know there is. It's like something that hasn't grown properly and gets in the way; they get it all wrong for themselves. Don't you think it's better to wait—to stay out? Then you'll get it right? Then you'd be happy, wouldn't you?"

"Yes." Lawrance trembled with agitation. "Yes," he repeated under stress: and added, almost harshly. "Don't be like the others, Olga, for God's sake!"

"I don't want all that. I don't want their sort of kissing and being together and making love. Why should I, if I don't want to? Doris seems to think I ought. She seems to think it's a sort of spite to her that I don't. I can't. It would only be all wrong and ugly; it would only hurt. I think of something quite different, and nobody comes into that. Nobody does: not even a person I've never seen. I don't imagine a person. What Doris does is pretending—at least it seems pretending to me. I'm sorry about Doris. You don't know, because she's quite different when you're there. I can't think why she goes with Fred Bovey, because she's either very cross afterwards, or else she's sad, and she keeps on being cross or sad nearly all the time till she sees him again. The other night she cried a lot. She scolded Marjorie, then she scolded me,—she looked as if she hated me,—and then when we went up to bed she cried most awfully; she said she'd been a bad girl and she wished she hadn't. Then she stopped crying, and was angrier than ever; she said I was a pious mule and I made her sick. She said I might think myself pretty, but the boys didn't, anyhow, and they never would, I was such a fool. I remember everything she

said. It is funny that I remember it all so clearly just that one time. I don't like remembering it."

"Don't think about things like that. Doris is nervous, you know. You're all three of you rather nervous girls—Nerves, that was all— Do you know what I should like, Olga? I should like to be able to take you right away, as if I were your brother; I should like to take you abroad—"

"Would the people be different?"

"Yes, people aren't the same everywhere as they are in North London— I wish you didn't go to that Business College place; you must feel frightfully lonely—"

"No, I'm not lonely. There are such lots of things— I don't know— No, I'm never lonely, not even when I'm with lots of other people."

"You've never really talked to me before, Olga. You will again, won't you?"

"Suppose it isn't the same another time?"

"What do you mean? Of course it will be the same."

"You know,"—she spoke after a pause—"I wish he'd go—Uncle Tofty—we don't like him—not really. Mother doesn't, I don't, nor Doris, either. He's horrid, I'm sure he's horrid!"

"Oh." Lawrance could not feel much interested in Mr. Tofton. "Your father—why doesn't he—?"

"Oh, Father—he never hates anybody."

"I wonder why—this time—you talked to me?"

"I knew I was going to talk to you to-night, because you liked me."

"Haven't I always been fond of you?"

"You're different to-day. You were different directly you came in this morning."

"Do tell me how."

“I don’t know how.”

They were in the Tottenham Court Road. Olga took her hand from him and began putting on her glove. Neither of them spoke again till they reached the “Trafalgar.” Lawrance had been all the while shy with her, afraid of saying the wrong thing, of taking what she said in the wrong way. He had picked his few slow words with nervous caution. He felt safer now that he had lost her hand, more on equal terms. “She’s my sister, she’s my friend,” he repeated to himself, and: “If you spoil this, you’re a fool! You know what she is.”

CHAPTER VIII

THEY went in, dazzled from the darkened streets. The place was crowded with people, crowded with voices, crowded with light. Olga held back; she took Lawrance's arm. "It's like when you wake up after taking gas," she said. "It's like a dream with the night all round it!"

A man by them heard her and smiled. Lawrance noticed, with acute antagonism: "Yes, it is!" he emphasized his answer. He wanted to say more, but couldn't; he felt more uncertain of himself, more incapable of the right kind of answer than ever. "And be damned to you, sir!" he would have said to the man.

He saw that Olga was observed, and observed more closely and more generally after she had taken off her coat. A spare, straight, middleaged man in evening dress, with a quick unbelieving eye and a careful grey moustache—a man whose impress of breeding was as assuringly stamped through as the watermark of a Bank of England note—said something in a dropped voice to his companion, and they both looked at Lawrance and Olga with remote impersonal insolence, in their way. Olga, with her plain pearl-grey frock, and her rich hair, simply tied, was unembarrassed, absorbed by the scene.

They sat through several rather dull "turns." "It's stupid now," Lawrance whispered her, "but you'll like Manon Gauffroux, and I've seen those Spanish dancers. They're really good."

"I like watching their faces," said the girl, "even if it's stupid, what they do."

Lawrance kept looking at her: he had not seen her like this, under a continuous preoccupation with outside things, since she was a little girl of twelve or thirteen, before his marriage. He remembered how he had taken her with Doris to Maskelyne and Devant's. But her former preoccupation was different; it had come of itself: she was personally involved now; she was, in a new way, responsible. Her red lips had parted then; now they were closed; her eyes went out to the scene; they did not wait to be reached. Gradually a flush grew in her cheeks, diversifying her beauty. That delicate colour, delicate as a reflected sunset, was not at all the colour of a child. Lawrance looked at the girls near him: Olga's face was more mature than any of theirs, much more mature: yet their course was set for these others; hers was not set for her. Olga had a hundred hints of change; she baffled any view of her future aspect. The contrast between her face and her figure, with its lines of earliest girlhood, was more and more exquisite: no one could have more perfectly corresponded to the term "*femme-enfant*." Lawrance rejoiced and was sad: he wished to be confederate with the genii of her growth; he feared he would be withheld. His sense of her was much too diffused for the admission to it, at that moment, of any usual male desire; she was there for him still as his "sister," his "child."

When the Interval came, she put her hands to her cheeks and turned to him, laughing.

"They're quite hot!" she cried. "See!" She took his hand and touched her cheek with his knuckles. "Shall we go and walk about?"

“Yes. We’ll have an ice—or something to drink? Which would you rather?”

The Promenade resounded with the emphatic presence of foreign prostitutes, all of them dressed with a defiant expensiveness. They were mainly Parisian and Belgian, exiles of the war. They roamed with exaggerated steps; they had the air of watchful repose peculiar to the higher grades of their profession. Some of them were arrestingly exotic. “There’s La Marquise,” said a man’s voice near them. “Don’t you remember? Used to be at the *Chat Maigre*.” “La Marquise” was tall and thin, in a white dress slashed by great black bars. She swept slowly by, with disdainful dominance, her black eyes were deep-set, burnt in; she wore her red-brown hair dropped in dense coils behind the nape of her neck; her mouth was an unnatural tiny red spot in the midst of the dead unfleshy whiteness expanded over her cheeks and bosom.

Olga looked intently at her. “Does she live here?” she whispered. “Do they all live here?”

Lawrance hurried on to the refreshment place, and they sat down.

“Everybody seems to be moving about as though it were all arranged beforehand,” she said. Her eyes were very bright.

“Do you like it?”

“Well, it isn’t exactly whether you *like* it or not—”

“Ah, Mr. Lawrance!”

Lord Burpham’s voice, somewhat mannered in its crispness and the judged balance of its tone, accosted the young man. He turned. “Well, sir!”

The other shook hands negligently with him.

“You don’t happen to know where Mr. Ralston is this

week-end, do you? I particularly want to get a message to him to-morrow."

"Yes, he's down at Horley."

"Ah. Thanks. I know the address." The man glanced at Olga; he looked a shade puzzled for a moment. "Ah." He hesitated. "I've mislaid my friend; the place is so crowded."

"Why not sit down here?"

"Good. Quite."

"Let me introduce you to Miss—to my sister. Olga, this is Lord Burpham."

Olga looked with a quick interested smile; she took the introduction without a trace of embarrassment. Lord Burpham gave her a bow the gallantry of which had a dash of humour, for recognition of Olga's youth. He was pleased by her; he relaxed; he was genially paternal, with at the same time a discreet and happy, an unimpeachable, eye to her sex.

"Well, Miss Lawrance, and what do you think of the show?" She started, but very slightly, at the name. "I've only just come in, myself. To hear the Gauffroux girl."

"Yes, that's why we came." Lawrance interrupted out of nervousness.

"Ah. I suppose that's why most of us have come. Nothing much else, is there? But of course one must see Manon Gauffroux. Of course."

He went on throwing out an unimportant sentence or two at intervals, and Lawrance, still nervous, and with a feeling of incompetence, put in what words he could bring to mind. Olga remained silent. Once or twice she gave Lord Burpham a clear, full, but momentary glance. He was a tall man of between forty and fifty,

slightly stooped, with a high permanent colour; it seemed impossible that he should ever either pale or be flushed. His grey eyes were both wary and naïve; his long thin face descended steeply to a well regulated dark-amber moustache; he presented lengthened straight lines of dark eyebrow, a withdrawing yet aptly modelled nose, with nostrils that had a sensitiveness that seemed to be held in check by his acute, directing rather than controlling jaw. His hair was sparse, of a faded light brown, carefully smoothed and arranged because of its sparseness. He suggested a legally defined property in his own features. A safe man, with few possible surprises.

“It’s the lack of the sense of relation,” he was saying, having passed, as he always did, by speedy transition, to his hobby of architecture, a hobby to which he was under resolute bond. “When people build nowadays, they don’t build in any sort of relation to the time in which they live. They imitate: they don’t think of their age and its condition, its needs. Look at this preposterous theatre. And it’s the same everywhere. There’s not a single modern building in London. All imitations,—er—harkbacks, you know. No reality about them, no life. You see what I mean, don’t you?”

“Yes,” said Olga, speaking almost for the first time, “but they get it, don’t they? They get life after awhile. Everything does,—you only have to leave it.”

Lord Burpham looked at her questioningly, with a slight surprise and a slight impatience. He hesitated, and tapped his fingers on the table. It was a little uncomfortable, this switching him off from his lines of usual travel.

“Ah!” He recovered himself with a smile. “You

know, there is something in that. I quite take your point. Of course a building does become less of a—er—a flaming anachronism—yes—as time goes on. Simply because we get used to it. Gets toned down. Takes its impress in a sort of way—yes. But how much better it would be, my dear young lady, if the harmony were there from the first! Don't you really think so,—ah?"

"I don't know— But I like all these new buildings. I like the 'Trafalgar'—because they're, well, because they're Londony."

"Yes; well—" Lord Burpham was indulgent. "Of course London has so much character that it can stand most kinds of—er—architectural outrage. I agree there. But you'd find that the right sort of buildings—the sort we're trying for—would be quite as 'Londony,' and in a much more intelligent way."

"What would they be like?"

The question replaced Lord Burpham happily in his accustomed track. His eyes became less wary, more naïve. He began to talk at once of the rejection of old models, the elimination of the Gothic, the Doric, the Georgian, the Renaissance Italian, of "all the sterile imitation forms"; he emphasized the need for simplicity, economy, he explained that nothing must be allowed that did not "minister to a need of modern life."

"No clash with the old buildings, either," he was saying as the three-minute bell rang. "Not in the least, not if you look at it in the right way. Architecture should be history,—one generation to another, and each generation on its own feet. For instance, down at Lipscot, in my new Wing there, we— But it's time for Manon, and besides I can't show you properly without plans. You can explain to your sister, Mr. Lawrance; you've been

down to Lipscot with Mr. Ralston. Better still, bring Miss Lawrance down yourself. Yes. We'll arrange it when I'm next at the Office. But you take the general idea, don't you? You see what we're getting at?"

"Yes—a little," said Olga, as they rose. "But wouldn't it be all rather like a sort of Exhibition?"

"Exhibition? Not at all. Absolutely natural—absolutely *fitting*. That's the whole point." Lord Burpham's tone was rather magisterially corrective, but his glance at the girl bringing him pleasure in her being so young and comely, his temper changed. "You'll see when you come," he went on, as they passed along the Promenade. "We must fix a day when my cousin can be there; he's one of the very few architects who really understand—Crockerton Deavitt—you may have—ah, Colby, there you are—" He said good-bye to them, and joined his companion.

Lawrance looked at Olga with a new admiration. He was extremely perturbed by the developments of the conversation—the invitation to Lipscot, and then Crockerton Deavitt! It was now probable enough that his lie about Olga being his sister would be detected; but admiration for Olga was his uppermost emotion, and he sought refuge in it.

She was wonderful; she had taken Burpham on equal terms, without any effort, no effort in the least! Now, if it had been Muriel! Muriel had never met Lord Burpham, but if she had, Lawrance knew quite well that somehow or other she would have betrayed herself; she would have shown she was conscious of his being a lord, however hard she might have tried not to show it. She would have been thinking all the while: "Well, I'm a lady; his having a title doesn't make him superior to me,

and I shall behave accordingly." The image of Muriel thus struggling and failing was for an instant pathetic to her husband: it pained him sharply; he suffered an unexpected emotional stab in that "Poor girl!" that came to him. He suffered too from the fugitive hint that all the tenderness that had once been so strong in him for "dear little Magsie," would have come swift, in a fine spontaneous outflow, to protect her on just such an occasion as that: it was a hint that he suppressed; he drove it back, but not out. The ghost of the delicate grave passion of old days kept lodging still with him, however silent and remote.

They were in their seats again. A girl with abundant flaxen hair and a large unnaturally shining bust was giving imitations of popular actresses. Lawrance looked at Olga by his side in the dim light. She was not, certainly not, in the usual acceptance of the term, a "lady," neither by birth nor by upbringing. He remembered Muriel's reference to the Flynns: "not the sort of people one knows." Yet Olga "behaved" better than he did himself; her soul, certainly, was much better mannered than his. She ignored, on the securest instinct, all irrelevancy. Perhaps because her father, the Polish dancer, had been really an artist. . . . Was that why she had sat silent, at her special detached ease, till something with which she felt a personal concern was said? Was that why, when she did speak, she spoke so naturally, altogether without that intrusive talkativeness that girls, leaving girlish silences, make their usual plunges for? She spoke without stupidity and without cleverness. Yes, Olga was neither stupid nor clever; that was one of her secrets; that was one reason why her mind was unblighted. Lawrance's thoughts of Muriel

were quite mute and invisible now: his pride in Olga had banished them far. Again he reverted to her well-mannered soul, reflecting that he himself, in his early days of acquaintanceship with Lord Burpham, had never got quite clear of the title: and even now he could not overcome a repressed consciousness of it, when other people, strangers to the peer or himself, were present. And yet Burpham, like most men of controlling preoccupations, was readily dissociated from his class.

After the flaxen caricaturist came Manon Gauffroux, with her fame, her beauty, her popularity as a daughter of allied France, palpably attendant upon her. She seemed to coquet with all three at once, as well as with the collective admiration that rose to her. Her appearance gave immediate assurance of her talent, assurance of the complete quality of its brilliant and facile touch. "Touch" was the word for her: as she sang her old French *chansons*, her old English ballads,—these latter with an enchanting French accent, both timid and brave, faltering most winningly to the "Bravos" of her hearers' minds,—she "touched" at one emotional surface after another, she fluttered on the windowsills of all the passions. She was everything that was pretty and piquant and quaint: the first impressions, from a distance, of beauty and love and jealousy and tragedy, she gave them all; then, with a toss of her admirable little golden head, with a light turn of her bewitching figure, with a moue of every conceivable enticement in caprice, she conjured desolation and broken hearts, angers and lusts and hates, each one, into prettiness and piquancy and quaintness, where, by the magic of her tiny wand, they stayed locked up. And all without real fantasy, without real imagination, without genius: her talent, un-

challengeable for what it was, exactly suited her huge audience, placed them on equal terms with her in spirit, gave them what was theirs, what was easy and charming to take,—flattered and satisfied them, too, by the fact of its being given thus, with this elegance more delectable than any they could have dreamed. Manon Gauffroux was perfectly and happily mistress of her own ruled-off marginal field, a field not ruled off from them, but for them. The house was in a frenzy for her.

“She’s extraordinarily good,” said Lawrance, when at last the hubbub subsided, some five minutes after the “call” which the singer decreed as final.

“Yes.” Olga was thoughtful, and her flush had a little faded. “Yes, but it’s all—playing at it, isn’t it?”

“Olga! I saw your eyes—”

“I know.” She turned and looked at him; she looked affectionately. “But playing at things makes your eyes get wet—often.”

Lawrance was not himself too young to recognize in Olga something of the pedantry of youth, something of that stiff-mindedness that is evidence of youth and chastity. But this only made her youth more sure for him: and dimly, sweetly, hurtingly, he took account of the future wearing down, on the wakening of passion, of the edges of her sharp impressions, the edges of her almost acrid desire for truth, of her sense of truth’s importance.

The Spanish dancers came, with their southern rapport of amorous sentiment with amorous sense, their keen-handed swift violence, their proud ferocity, and their “frankness” that really is not frankness as the northern mind understands the word, because of the absence for balance of any implied conception of northern “reti-

cence." They circled, hovered, leapt, clashed, entwined, sang, cried out for one another, closed in on one another, in complete indifference to their audience,—an indifference that struck down to fibres of deep root, that was involved with absorption in essential hungers and essential strifes. Lawrance felt excited and afraid; he took Olga's hand; he was threatened. Her flush returned; she was troubled and stirred,—but why, how, he could not tell. She leaned forward, she frowned; once she smiled curiously. Her eyes brightened as they had never brightened for Manon Gauffroux; her face grew suddenly childlike. . . . Later its expression changed again: she looked remote and yet involved, chaste but not innocent. Lawrance could not help breathing heavily. She pressed his hand: he glanced again at her, and saw that now, as at first, she was puzzled, but puzzled as though she liked it. He was baffled: he could not tell at all what was happening, or what might happen: every implication evaded him.

The audience had settled down to appreciation of the Spanish dancing as of a "turn" that was "a bit thick in parts, you know,"—still, one could keep an attitude of moral neutrality because the people were foreigners, and of course it was their way: silly to be prudish. Rather naughty, but licensed, and you might as well enjoy it. There was a display of tempered enthusiasm: Lord Burpham, like most of the others, clapped gently and not for too long, so as not to commit himself. The "Trafalgar" was a high-class "Hall."

"Well," Lawrance asked, "and how did you like that?"

She gave him a grave look. "It wasn't so easy," she said.

“Not so easy! Why, every one thinks Manon is so subtle and delicate and all that, and these Spanish people,—well, they say they’re—you know the kind of thing they say,—‘primitive force’—‘resolving the passions to their first elements’—and all that. ‘Simplicity and sheer directness of animal vitality.’ I was reading a notice only yesterday—”

“I didn’t know what they meant—what they really meant—all the same. But it was something important. I’m very glad indeed we saw them. I shall think about them. They weren’t playing at anything.”

Lawrance’s emotions kept beating him. She was still grave, and still flushed, when they left the theatre.

CHAPTER IX

“**O**H, a four-wheeler! But won't you be awfully late getting back after coming home with me?”

“It doesn't matter. No—really. Let's take this. You see, the Tube will be crowded, and all the taxis have been snapped up.” Lawrance spoke rapidly.

When they were inside the cab, she touched his knee. “It's exciting, all this, isn't it?” she said, and laughed.

“Oh, Olga!” He gave her a long look, a look that he meant to be tender and understanding, but which was, in fact, desirous, apprehensive.

“Just think! London—real London—isn't it different from our part?” She was leaning forward, away from him; she gazed at the streets with their dimmed shine; she took in the blurred and various lines of the buildings. “Just think! All these shops and theatres and hotels! I love London. And that man would like to have everything altered!”

“Well, not exactly. He'd leave the old buildings as they are; what he'd alter would be the new ones.”

“Yes, but nearly all these are new, and they're all lovely. Isn't London much better now they've darkened the streets?— I like some quite little things about London, I like them awfully. The way they put the 'A' in the sign of the Gaiety Theatre,—and the 'H.' We're just there, but you can't see it now. Would he think that was wrong?”

"I'm sure Lord Burpham would say that was unnecessary and teasing ornamentation."

"Well, I like it! Oh, wasn't it funny Mr. Deavitt being his cousin? Mr. Deavitt didn't build that new Wing he wanted us to see, did he?"

"No." Lawrance avoided looking at her now; he was determined not to be false to the unflinchingly ideal of his affection,—determined, and horribly nervous under the determination. "No, I'm sure he didn't. I never heard Lord Burpham speak of Mr. Deavitt before. You know," he went on eagerly, for if only they could talk on unimportant subjects all the time, and he could keep his mind fixed, then he would be safe, "you know that new Wing at Lipscoth isn't half bad, really. It would have been a sight, right enough, if Burpham had had his way, but the man who did it—what's his name? I know it quite well,—he, well, he really fooled Burpham, you know, so he ended by making the thing presentable." Lawrance, not being ready of speech, found this talking for safety a great effort. "There's something in Lord Burpham's ideas, but he's got no notion of practical application, no notion at all. I wonder why he's taken up Deavitt as an authority now; I suppose he quarrelled with the other man—"

"Is Lord Burpham's house old?"

"Oh, yes, pretty old. Lipscoth House is Elizabethan, I think,—or it may be earlier. I don't quite know. You see I don't understand anything about architecture, really; I don't do anything but the Occult business—"

"Well, I should think that new Wing must look funny, even if— I don't—" She stopped abruptly. "Oh!" She leaned back. "I'm tired." Her low-pitched voice quivered a little. She took his hand. "Do you ever get

tired?" She looked at his strained face, with its suffering dark eyes. "Do you ever get tired like that—suddenly? Oh, Uncle Lorrie,—no, 'Lorrie,' I will say 'Lorrie,' I remember,—I loved it to-night, but I *am* tired. You are, too. Don't let's talk any more."

She leaned back farther; she was aslant against him, her head rested below his shoulder, her slight arm lay along. She was utterly relaxed: he felt her unknowing warmth, felt it about and through him, overpowering, with no intent. For more than ten minutes they neither of them moved. He could only repeat to himself, over and over: "This is awful; this is awful!" When she did move, she settled herself rather more closely to him, giving him sharp torture. "I don't want it!" he cried inwardly, as though calling God to witness. "I don't want it!"

The streets grew darker and darker. They were out past Euston now. Lawrance felt that he might be saved by doing something wild, by calling to the driver and telling him to turn back to Euston Station, then taking her away with him by some night-express North. If only he had to get tickets and find a compartment! Anything of that kind! But this was unbearable,—he would go mad. He did not reason at all; he never once thought: "What if I do embrace her?" or: "What if I do not?" thus setting trains of possible effects in visionary motion. His sole engrossment was with resolve in opposition to desire. The fantastic idea of the midnight express flashed on him from outside: he could not cope with it, nor with anything else but his desire: it paled, that idea, and vanished, leaving him struggling without help.

She stirred, and he felt her hair against his chin. Why

had he taken that four-wheeler? Those very qualities in her that he had believed must keep him back and set him right,—her vague and troubled delicacy, her tremulousness still remote, her fugitive half-sense of the bloom that was there for her, but not yet,—all this racked him, tore his soul with a cruel temptation of cruelty in passion. It was just because it would be specially wrong and out of time— He dared not look at nor think of her unripened figure, her figure so exquisitely in the way to be ready; he tried to think that she was made like Doris. He imagined Doris, grossly burlesqued, by his side.

“Hold me,” she said sleepily. “I should like that—Well, don’t you want to? I suppose I should make you uncomfortable.”

“If I do—” He stopped, and found himself reflecting upon his absurdly theatrical intonation of the words. “If I do,”—he tried to take a lighter pitch,—“well, I shall kiss you; I shall hug you; that’s all. I tell you—I—”

“Well, why—? It wouldn’t matter, would it? Don’t you always kiss me?”

She sat straight up; he caught the gleam of her eyes, but could not see her expression.

“I don’t know,” he said. “I should be sorry, you see; I should be sorry if—oh, Olga!”

He lifted her to him, took her full in his arms, kissing her savagely about the mouth and neck, trembling to the sense of her unaccustomed flesh. Her lips were open: he held her so closely, his kisses were so violent, that he did not know if she trembled or responded. An immense wave of physical relief overcame him, washing out everything. At last he relaxed his clasp of her a

little, but he kissed her still; he kissed her arms, he took her hand and kissed it. He was faint with her, she was so strange and unused. There was no remorse.

"You're my girl, *mine!*" he whispered. "I can't love you more—I can't!"

"I'd like to sit quietly now."

She lay against him in silence, and he heard her heart. He kept his arms about her waist, her waist that was too girlish to be boyish, too boyish to be girlish. He caught gently at her now and again, he kissed her more tenderly, but with passion still. His ecstasy lingered, in sweeter stress.

"That's what people do when they're in love, isn't it?" she said at last.

"Ah, then, you don't love me!"

"I don't know. There must be something more—it wasn't the end."

"No—in a way; but that isn't the most important." Lawrance misunderstood her: he thought she spoke out of instinct and innocence.

"I mean that I must have more to feel. I mean that it wasn't important enough. Now if it had made me different all through—!"

"Oh, Olga, I do love you!" He was appealing, almost plaintive. "I couldn't love you more than this—I do love you!"

"Do you? I like that—if you do really—but it's not—oh, I don't know! Perhaps—"

"Kiss me."

"I'd rather you kissed *me*. Isn't it funny, how you think about things, and then they're different? I'm not sorry, but it's difficult. Look, there's Camden Town Tube. We're nearly there. I'm not unhappy at all, or

cross. I wonder why Doris is. Perhaps she can be really in love, after all, and that's why—but I don't think so."

"Olga! If you didn't want me to let you go, you must love me—a little."

"I hope I don't."

"Why? What do you mean?"

"Why, don't you see?—of course—because there'd be nothing for afterwards—nothing new."

"Shall I have anything to do with that?" He was resentful.

"I don't know at all." She was unusually decisive.

"You're not angry with me, anyhow?" he said weakly.

"Of course not. I like you just the same as I did before. You didn't seem to be there—that was what it was like—as if you weren't in it." He winced, and wanted to feel that she was brutal, but couldn't. Then his acquired sentiment blamed her for immodesty, but unconvincingly. "I began it. I wanted to, partly because of those Spanish dancers— Father talks about Catholics of Spain. I think those dancers would be good Catholics, and Manon Gauffroux wouldn't. You see," she went on very slowly, "I thought I could do that—like people do when they're in love—just trying it—as a sort of help—because I've known you so long, and you understood—and you weren't like the others—and to-day you'd been different to what you were before."

"But you weren't cold, Olga; you weren't cold!"

"I didn't feel cold."

He wondered if she had taken him in a purely literal sense. "You were loving to me!" he protested, not being at all sure that she was.

"In a way, yes; I—"

"Not in the right way?"

"There'll be another way later on, I'm sure."

"Well, was it a—a help?" He sought relief in an ironical tone.

"Yes. I know I've—I know I've something to love with."

"You are extraordinary. I can't understand you, Olga."

"Well, you were happy."

"I'm not happy now."

"I want you to be. Would you be happy if you took me and kissed me like that again, another time?"

"I think we'd better wait." He was on his dignity.

"It's only playing at it, isn't it? But you can, whenever you like."

"Olga! Don't let any one else!"

"All right. Here's our house."

"Promise me!"

"Yes, I promise. I don't want to let any one else."

"Ah, not yet!" he bitterly reflected, as they got out: then, his emotions switching: "I've done wrong! It's awful!"

"Well you two!" Doris's voice greeted them jocularly as they entered the house. They went through the half-open door of the dining-room and saw her lying half-asleep in a large chair by the fire. "Have a good time?" She got up and felt her hair and patted her blouse before lighting the gas. "What's the show like at the 'Traf.'?"

Lawrance noticed that Olga's natural pallor had returned.

"We went to the Camden 'Palace,'" Doris went on. "What did you think of Manon?— Oh, you *are* all

rumpled up!" She looked with veiled jealousy at Olga. "I expect you're tired," she added meaningly.

"Yes, awfully."

"Well, goodnight, Doris! Goodnight, Olga!"

He touched her cheek with his lips, left them, and walked rapidly, thinking and wondering, being angry and being amorous, to the Camden Town Tube. He could not help feeling that in some way or other Muriel had scored.

CHAPTER X

DURING the next few days Muriel, to her husband's surprise, was affectionate, maternal and gay. She did not once refer to his visit to the Flynns; indeed she did not refer to the Flynns at all. She treated Lawrance with a specialized tact, as a skilled nurse treats an invalid. He guessed that she was acting on a set purpose, and he was puzzled that she should show this kind of cleverness: he did not realize that nearly all women are clever under certain impulses. He had never had any but the scantest glimpses of generalities about women or about life: he rarely, even in the humblest way, philosophized. Nor was he at all a close observer, but Muriel's change of conduct was so definite that he could not have helped noticing it. He did not like it at first; it made him uneasy, but he had some consolation in reflecting that Muriel was only making it difficult for him to do what he did not mean to do anyhow just yet, that was to go and see the Flynns. He soon found himself, on the whole, much less irritable, much less bitter, much less vindictive. He was, without knowing it, exactly in the mood to be smoothed, in the mood to have his pillows patted, his hair stroked, and his bedclothes tucked in for him. The sincerity of Olga had given his pride a really severe shock. Nothing could have had so surely the effect of a rebuff.

Married people are especially soothed, just as they are especially exasperated, by the various habitual inci-

dentials of their state. Hence the extraordinary power, for comfort or for worry, of wife over husband, of husband over wife. They both know: it is open to them both to suppress or to evoke: and so, easily, without overt sign, Muriel suppressed during these particular days nearly all the little incidental things that made for the disturbance of her husband's daily course, she evoked nearly all that were calming and harmonious. She tightened the bonds that drew the habit of her gratefully to him, she relaxed those that drew it vexingly. She played the good wife, she was always on the look out. "You don't understand her," he found himself thinking. "She's a woman of fibre, of self-control."

He was, at the least, not sorry to be in the same house with her: at the most, he had a sense of domestic security and kind domestic vigilance that pleased him well. "Domestic" he was, at bottom: "Bohemia" was hardly a region for his holiday trips, certainly not for his residence. His attraction to the Flynns was for themselves, not for their setting, not for their way of life: it was fed by his profound loyalty to friendships of early youth, by his dependence upon associations to which he was well used. Lawrance's revulsions against the day-after-day intimacies of marriage struck down to no roots of revolutionary theory native to his spirit: they were the kind of revulsions known from time to time by most quite usual married men, who come to put up with them as they put up with colds in the head, as normally intermittent; colds, in a temperate climate: these revulsions, in wedlock. And particularly severe revulsions, like particularly severe colds, result in fever. Muriel was applying what was—not pressing the metaphor too far—a homœopathic cure.

She did not want to lose him, and she felt rather than planned her way to hold him. Her task, with men of certain other temperaments, would have been far more difficult, for though Lawrance's passions were violent and easily stirred, they were easily diverted: if diverted before his obstinacy hardened. Again, he was subject to the flattery and the convenience of personal attention, subject also to the influence of the recall of memories that their earlier married life had given. That "Do you remember . . . ?" touched and pleased him. On one occasion she led him to remember, stirring and significantly, a certain rare drawing of her to him in their early married days. "How strong you are!" Her words came back, none the less vibrant because he was not really strong, and never had been.

Muriel was helped, too, by there never having been between them wounds that went really deep: and, most importantly, her temperamental coldness did not of necessity debar a simulation with which his blood co-operated, hardly at all debarred it now that she was set on "being nice to him." Here she was helped tremendously by his experience with Olga: he took, in a sense, revenge upon the girl.

It was not for one reason only that he had resolved not to go to the Flynns' soon again. The meeting with Lord Burpham troubled Lawrance much, troubled him more and more. The humiliation of his lie about Olga being his sister gathered weight, and he had no humour to bring relief. He was weighted too by the increasingly afflicting consciousness of what the verdict of men of Lord Burpham's code would be upon his conduct. Morality came home to him in this very usual way: he could hear others talking; he knew that to them he would be

a "rotter" for what he had done. Not that "they" were not lenient within prescribed limits, much more lenient, of course, than the abstract code: but these limits, he knew perfectly well, would not include behaviour like his. He would be allowed to have "affairs," under regulation of good form, but: "A married man's no business to go taking a girl barely sixteen to the 'Trafalgar' and messing about with her in a cab on the way back." It didn't "do"; it wasn't the thing, and it was damn bad luck on his wife.

He knew exactly why he had lied to Lord Burpham; knew exactly what Lord Burpham's defined coldness to him would be like, if he found out. And Lord Burpham would be articulating the attitude of thousands; he would be representing something that was tremendously and formidably backed, something old and strong, something that must be justified in being there. Lawrance had not a grain of the gay defiance that could ignore it, and enjoy ignoring it all the more because it was so portentous and so fixed. He might clench his hand, but he could never snap his fingers, with: "Oh, don't you like it, my dear ones! What funny little men you are!" They were not funny at all to him, and they loomed. "It's awful!" he would repeat. He was not able for the reflection that our way of treating sex is quite as much of a Phallic ritual as any, and hardly more unsuccessful than most. He had no fears whatever on the economic score: his fifteen hundred pounds invested with Ralston and Inge kept him securely with them. Besides, he knew he had value: he was indeed excellent in his work, reliable; never brilliant, but with serviceable powers of concentration, a good head, and a journalistic sense. Without him, old Inge would be sure to run amuck, and he

would be difficult to replace, especially with so many men gone or going to the war. No, it was the idea of the disfavour of this consolidated opinion that hurt him; even though he were never to come into actual contact with it, that would not matter. It would still be overpoweringly there. He used to look at Muriel, thinking: "And she has all *that* behind her!" He felt that instinctively she knew it, knew that she was in this way "tremendously backed." All her kindness, all her care and thought for him, seemed to emphasize the legality, the acceptedness, of their relations. He was too much in the wash of reaction to resent this, to dislike her because of it: it seemed, indeed, rather to support him; to be bringing "opinion" round to his side, as he had vainly tried to do by telling himself that he had known Olga since she was little, that he was an old friend of the family,—a humorous touch, this, to another,—that there had been no "impropriety." These excuses did not in the least affect that sure and dispassionate condemnation from outside: Lawrance was neither clever nor dishonest enough for them to do that.

Lord Burpham was "round at the Office" a few days after the "Trafalgar" evening. He asked Lawrance: "How about Monday of next week?" "Charming girl, your sister, Mr. Lawrance," he said. "Charming girl." The young man told him that she was not very well. So the matter dropped, with the usual expressions.

Lawrance, at the end of the week, was the more impressed by and unhappy for the news that his real sister Letty was as a fact "not very well." These were the words used by Lawrance's mother at the beginning of her letter, but what followed was more alarming, although his mother's tone, throughout, was one of gossip at ease about her daughter. Lawrance gathered that the

girl—she was about five years younger than he—was threatened by consumption. A sore place at the bottom of one of her lungs. She coughed and had lost weight. The doctor advised complete rest, careful diet, and the open air. He did not think it imperative that she should leave Malstowe, where they lived: there were better places, it was true, but there was no danger in remaining, if Letty were careful about rest and fresh air. Mrs. Lawrance would have liked, she wrote, to have taken the dear girl to one of those “better places,” but Oliver knew her difficulties; her heart trouble prevented her from travelling, besides, getting abroad seemed almost impossible, with the war; it would be dreadful if there were two invalids, and dear Letty did not at all want to leave her and go with any one else. So they must hope it would be all right at Malstowe, where after all they did have a fine sea air. But what did Oliver think? She wanted—they both wanted—his advice, very much. If he could possibly come down for a day or two—

Lawrance, upset and sad, handed the letter to his wife. “Poor little girl!” she exclaimed. She was tender and grave, she was sympathetic in just the right way. Lawrance was touched, and in a sense flattered, because Letty, for whom Muriel was preoccupied, was his sister.

“Of course I shall go,” he said.

Muriel asked, very sweetly and seriously, if she might come too.

“Of course,” he told her. “Of course, darling. That is what I should like. We’ll take a week.”

“It won’t be a bother for your mother, having us both? She didn’t say—”

“Oh, that was only because she thought I shouldn’t be

able to get off for more than a day or two. But things are slack now. A week will be all right."

"Poor Letty! I am sorry, Doll—I do hope—"

No one could have shown more considerate feeling for a sister-in-law. Muriel made the most of the immense advantage that women have in situations of the kind.

Lawrance telegraphed. An hour or so later he winced a little when Mr. Ralston, who had overheard him and Lord Burpham, said: "Your sister is *worse?*"

CHAPTER XI

LAWRANCE and his wife, on their arrival at about five o'clock, were greeted by Letty in her hat and coat. She ran out into the hall from the drawingroom. "You dear things! I *am* glad we got back in time!" She kissed them. "I'll come up with you."

Lawrance's glance into the drawingroom revealed two young men, one of whom he knew pretty well, the other a stranger; a young girl, familiar as a friend of his sister's, and his mother. Mrs. Lawrance's plentiful person was fully occupying a deep wicker chair; she made it look flimsy. In her important brown and yellow flowered silk she was like an expensive bouquet in its paper wrapper, she was a floral decoration too abundant for the scene. She was prodigious, not at all superb. They were all having tea, talking, being amused. Lawrance resented strongly the pleasant and casual air of this little tea-party. Nothing in the least as he had expected. Hang it, he'd come to see his family . . . serious matter . . . surely they might have . . . this kind of intrusion. . . .

"There! You'll come down soon, won't you? We'll have some tea made fresh. Mother's longing to see you. I look all right, don't I? Nothing really the matter, it's not worth talking about—only a stupid little sore place somewhere or other. . . . Yes, I'm drinking milk and I've had the sashes of all my windows taken out. Mother

and I changed rooms because she has such a lot of windows. Come along soon!"

Lawrance, in his dressing-room, washed his hands slowly. He didn't know who to be angry with: he couldn't be angry with Letty, she was so pretty and she had kissed him so affectionately; he couldn't be angry with his mother, his floral and stationary mother, any more than he could be angry with some enormous bloom. She was there; she had to be there, copiously, just like that, and nothing but her appearance could be expected of her. Lawrance realized, with full flush of feeling, how very fond he was of both his mother and Letty. He remembered Letty as a little girl. By Jove! how pretty she was then, and what a little flirt! She had never had an awkward age. Thirteen, fourteen—fifteen, he had always been proud of her, and there had never been any trouble, either: she had never gone over the line, or near it,—not really near— Prettier than ever, she seemed, now she was ill. Her large brown kindling eyes seemed larger, her colour more daring and bright. She seemed to give a keener sense of herself. That brown hair of hers, with its flashes of gold, more frequent and more alight than Olga's russet gleams; her large but clear-cut and wholesomely amorous mouth; her fervent sharply-striking grace of figure. . . . No one could be prettier. And now those cursed "T. B."!

Lawrance noticed a photograph of Letty, taken when she was sixteen: just Olga's age. Olga? Letty would not have been in the least like Olga; she would never . . . He checked himself: he had no business to be thinking of Olga now— What the devil was that young Ted Phillips doing down at Malstowe? Why wasn't he in khaki? Of course he was after Letty; very bad for her;

he was handsome, too; it must be stopped. Lawrance knew now who to be angry with; he would be, he was, angry with Phillips. A strong, healthy young fellow like that; a bachelor with an independent income; he was the very sort they wanted for the Army. They ought to bring in Compulsory Service! Lawrance's public school honour checked him here: he felt he had no right to wish for Compulsory Service, as he was physically unfit himself. Anyhow, what did Phillips mean by it, idling down at a seaside place, running about after a girl who was ill, upsetting her? Lawrance would have a long talk that evening with his mother. . . .

"Aren't you coming, Doll?" Muriel's known tap came at the door between their rooms.

When they got down, the three intruders had disappeared. Letty was at the tea-table, and Mrs. Lawrance still in her chair, from which she made a tentative inadequate effort to detach herself, as her son and daughter-in-law came in. They approached her hurriedly: it seemed so very wrong that she should get up, yet almost indelicate to allude to that operation by asking her not to.

"Well—Oliver darling—darling Muriel." As they bent to her, she emitted her salutations, in a voice that seemed to emerge by a difficult yet dignified process of filtration through unseen pores. "I never can go anywhere, you know." This was the refrain of her life, as familiar as her vague benevolent smile, her heavy-lidded grey eyes that suggested clouds rather than light, and her pursed irregular mauve-tinted lips. "Yes, do take some tea, Oliver. You must be hungry—thirsty, I mean,—after your journey." She stopped again for breath, and her body was gently stirred, like the sail of a ship in quiet weather. Her son sat by her, and Muriel

went over to Letty. "Perhaps you are hungry, though. And you, dear Muriel? You could have eggs. Nellie would boil you eggs. You don't look very well, Oliver darling. You must have been working too hard. Isn't it wonderful, Letty dear, the way he works? Won't you really have eggs? Yes, they are high just now, because of the war." She confirmed, according to her custom, an imaginary statement of some one else.

"Is that man Phillips down here for long?" Lawrance took advantage of another of the intermissions to which his mother was physically compelled.

"Everything seems to be going up, even the doctors' bills." Lawrance stared at her, amazed, but there was nothing that seemed heartless about her. "I can't understand at all about Doctor Peachey. His last bill—so very large, darling, so very *large*." She dropped her voice, suspiring confidentially. "And really he hasn't been to see me so frequently as usual. Absurdly large. Yes, I feel sure that sugar wouldn't do me any harm, really. That saccharine stuff is not the same, you are quite right. It's like condensed milk—you know what I mean—not *like* it, of course, but just as bad. And I do get so tired of—"

She went intermittently on; while Letty talked excitedly to Muriel about the diversions of a country house where she had been staying the month before.

Lawrance was annoyed,—dully, because his mother always had a quasi-hypnotic effect upon him. He kept thinking: "She's exactly the same as she was before—extraordinary; it makes no difference whatever, she says all the same things." His attention drifted to the enthusiasms of Letty; he heard her telling Muriel what a lovely time she had had; what a lovely time they had all

had together; how jolly the hunting had been, and the dancing, and the bridge, and what a splendid new 60 h.p. motor Mr. Markby-Levin had got. Lawrance cursed the Markby-Levins—vulgar new-rich people with their interloping possession of Captain Walmer's place! Of course they had kept Letty up to all sorts of hours, driven her to death one way or another all the day! That was why she was ill.

"I particularly want to talk to you, Mother," he said. "Do get Letty to take Muriel out into the garden."

"Of course, darling, of course. I want to talk to you, too. That business of the Beecher estate, dear, it is so very trying. Mr. Flick was here for an hour and a half yesterday morning, explaining it. I did wish you had been there to help me. You know how difficult they make these things. It seems we have to give some kind of a—what is it that they call it? I know quite well—oh, yes, a 'release,' that's what it is, a '*release*.' " She emphasized the word with the peculiar satisfaction that she always had in legal terms. "If you could spare the time, Oliver dear, just to look over the papers that Mr. Flick left. I was saying to him how lucky it was that we expected you down to-morrow—that is, to-day. He quite agreed with me that—"

Lawrance saw that Muriel had finished her tea. "Mother," he interrupted, "don't you think—?"

"Of course," she continued; "now what was it I was going to tell you? Something important, I know— Oh, yes, about the Beecher estate. You know, it seems so very odd"—she panted—"so very odd, calling it an *estate*. But that's the way the lawyers do. Of course dear Uncle Harry had no *land*, you know—he hadn't even a house—he always lived in hotels—such a strange

taste, but then of course he was a bachelor, and you see—”

“Come along, Magsie, before it grows dark. I want to show you where I’m going to have the tennis next summer.”

Lawrance gave the women a relieved smile as they went out.

“And there’s that other matter, too,—that plot of land near the house. It’s so nice to be able to have your advice, darling: you see, dear Letty, of course, doesn’t understand; how can you expect her to?”

“It’s about Letty I want to talk, Mother. Surely she’s more important than anything else just now? What exactly did the doctor say?”

“Darling Letty! Yes, I quite agree with you; she must take care of herself, and do just what the doctor tells her. She’s very sensible about it all. But do let me tell you about this plot of land—it will all go out of my head. You see, they’re certain to build on it sooner or later, and that would be dreadful,—it would quite shut us up. Mr. Flick thought they might build an hotel of several stories! Just fancy! That’s why Rawlings is holding out for seven hundred pounds. I think that’s *much* too much. Such a very *large* sum, considering the size of the plot. Now Mr. Flick says—‘*Wait.*’” With her hands folded upon her profuse lap, with the lavish aspect of her body hallmarked at every point as static, Mrs. Lawrance seemed capable of following that advice forever. “He says that the price will go down in a few months, because of the war. He says that *capital* is getting more and more—how did he put it in his letter? ‘The purchasing power’—that was it—‘the purchasing power of capital is rapidly increasing.’ It sounded so convincing; it was the way he put it. He

says nobody is building now. Of course, Oliver, as you know, I have every confidence in Mr. Flick, but then the war may be over, mayn't it? I'm sure that's what we all hope. I don't quite like to wait for the price to be less; that would be almost like *hoping* the war wouldn't be over, wouldn't it? That wouldn't be at all nice. I quite see what you mean, dear, that wouldn't be nice at all. With our brave soldiers out there in those dreadful trenches. But I don't want to give seven hundred. Five is quite enough, and Mr. Flick says I may get it for four—even three, if I wait. Really, I—”

“I'm sure you will wait, Mother. And don't worry about the war. Capital will be just as valuable when it's over—for a time, at any rate.”

“Oh, do you think so?” She brightened almost violently, for her; she even swayed a little. “Well, that is a relief! I do enjoy these little talks with you, darling,—you don't know—”

Lawrance felt instantly so sure of her enjoyment that he got up and kissed her. He was all the more baffled because of his affection. She was so helpless, so harmless, so entirely as he had always known her and always would know her. Noting her mauve-tinted lips, he thought for a moment, anxiously, of her weak heart. His inheritance from her of that weakness was a bond between them.

“Mother, I do want to talk about Letty.” He knew it was no use, but he had to satisfy his conscience. “You say she's sensible, but I'm sure she doesn't realize in the least. I know she doesn't. I must do something, really I must.”

“Oh, Doctor Peachey told her most distinctly that she must keep quiet.”

"But she doesn't keep quiet— I do wish she wouldn't go staying with those awful Levin people! The worst kind of influence—"

"Oh, but that was before she *knew* she wasn't well, Oliver!" Mrs. Lawrance looked comfortably at him, as much as to say: "So that makes it all quite right, doesn't it?" "Yes," she continued, "it's quite true they did make all their money out of some kind of soap for dogs—or was it a dog-biscuit?—it's advertised everywhere; how stupid of me; I ought to know. Something for dogs, it is, I'm sure of that,—but every one knows them, even the Duke, and they certainly did help Lord Framlingham a lot at the last Election. Of course they wouldn't have been quite the sort of people one knew in the old days—but still—"

The phrase recalled the Flynns and Olga. Lawrance, on sudden compulsion, kissed the girl again in imagination. He flushed, he felt ashamed of his thoughts, they seemed to be guilty of a gross impropriety as he sat there by his mother's bounteous and familiar form. Again, and with an effort as before, he banished Olga.

"It was probably staying with those Levins that brought on the trouble with Letty," he said gravely. "Late hours and all that."

"I don't know at all, dear." Mrs. Lawrance sighed. "Of course she must keep quiet."

"I'm sure she doesn't mean to!"

His mother looked at him, wondering and harassed. He felt remorseful. What, after all, was the point of worrying her? He must take the matter into his own hands. What to do? He kept thinking as Mrs. Lawrance talked.

“And, you know, they say that Mr. Chubb and Mr. Molliott had quite a quarrel—”

She branched out into one of those little pieces of local gossip that she turned over so curiously and pondered upon at such length. For so long as her son could remember, she had been occupied almost exclusively either with an ineffective struggling concern—not in the least avaricious—about business, or with a carefully weighted interest in the doings of her neighbours, an interest that always suggested that it was a toil, but an agreeable and necessary one, to her to keep up with them. Being afflicted by a genuine disease, she was not occupied with her health: her doctor interested her only as a neighbour, and because of his bills.

“... and it seems that Mr. Chubb came round one morning, and Mr. Molliott was in bed. Mr. Chubb wanted a book and Mr. Molliott threw it down the stairs and hit him on the head. Quite unintentional, of course. It was one of those heavy books—a Biography or a book of travels or something—so unfortunate. They say Mr. Chubb was very angry and swore dreadfully,—that was what the housekeeper said,—and then Mr. Molliott laughed, which wasn’t very nice of him, because the book had struck Mr. Chubb on the forehead,—but I don’t suppose he knew that,—it struck him with the edge and made quite a wound. And they were such old friends. I do hope they’ll make it up. I told Mr. Chubb that it wouldn’t seem so bad if he thought of the soldiers at the front. He goes about with a plaster, poor man. His cousin is quite a wonderful woman. . . .” And so on, gregariously and charitably, till Letty came back and said that Muriel had gone to dress.

“Oh, then Mabel is ready for me—”

Mrs. Lawrance never called any of her servants by their surnames. Christian names conformed with the sort of intimacy she liked to have with them. Her son helped her up: she leaned on him gently, for all her ungauged prodigality of flesh.

Lawrance, as they walked upstairs together, had a careful eye for Letty. Yes, she was a little thinner, but only a little: really she had hardly altered at all. Her eyes were brighter. He had noticed her cough, but it came rarely and seemed insignificant. Some excuse for her refusal to take her illness seriously, perhaps. He must talk to her. How very different it was from what he had expected! One thing was quite certain; they must have a second opinion. Doctor Peachey was an excellent general practitioner, still in a matter of this seriousness— Of course any one but his mother would have insisted upon a second opinion. No doubt Doctor Peachey himself had suggested it. He must get Letty up to London to see a specialist. She would jump at London. That would be easy.

They parted from their mother at her bedroom door. "I must dress, Budsie," said the girl, using the name she had put to him when she was a baby: she only used it now when they were alone.

"Let's come with you." He took her slim arm, and went with her to her bedroom.

"Oh!" she said, as she turned on the light, "Amy hasn't pulled down the blinds."

The unglassed, uncurtained windows struck Lawrance as reminders, black and harsh, of his sister's state: the little blue rolls of blind at the tops of them were really ugly in their meagreness.

"It's such a nuisance," Letty went on. "She pulls

them all down before I dress and before I go to bed, then she comes in directly afterwards and pulls them up again. Oh!" She hurriedly turned off the electric switch. "We're breaking the law! Are they strict in London about lights not showing from houses? They're awfully strict here. We had Mr. Molliott in the other evening, complaining; he's a Special Constable now, you know." She stopped for one of her little coughs. "I generally undress in the bathroom."

Lawrance went round the room, pulling down the blinds. When he turned on the light he saw that his sister was leaning against the back of a chair.

"You're tired!"

"No, I'm not!"

She walked over hurriedly to the mirror and began unfastening her blouse. He looked at her reflection; he was struck by the hard sharp sweet savour of her sisterly intimacy with him. How keen and cool their affection had always been! How full of trust and health, how peculiarly happy! He was sure of her, sure that she really did love him— She took off her blouse, showing her arms and her neck: yes, she was certainly thinner. Lawrance sighed.

"You *are* staring, Budsie!"

"Darling, I do want you to be careful!"

"Oh, I *am*!"

"You don't *look* careful, somehow, not a bit!"

She made a face at him in the mirror; she laughed uncertainly. "What do you expect me to look like?"

"I don't believe you'll ever get really well till you get away from here: I mean till you lead quite a different kind of life."

"Why, Malstowe isn't so hilarious as all that; it isn't

so frantically lively." She began playing with her little blue ribbons.

"But you keep on going out to all sorts of things; dances and bridge-parties and dinners—nearly every day. I heard you talking to Muriel. I don't see that you're making any difference at all. You'd just come back from a motor ride when we turned up."

"Motoring's good for me."

"H'm. Depends on whose motor it is."

"Oh, Mr. Phillips is awfully nice. He's good for me, too!" She turned: her lighted brown eyes teased him frankly.

"But I'm worried about you, Letty old dear, I really am."

"Yes, it is an awful nuisance." She stood up, pressed her little hands flat to either side of the top of her skirt, releasing the snaps. "But it isn't as though I had the beastly thing, not really *had* it."

"I wish you'd go slow, all the same, just for a bit."

"Oh, I can't lock myself up, Budsie!"

"What are you doing to-night? Staying at home with us, I hope."

"Well, I was going with Miriam for bridge at the Colonel's. Is that awfully wicked?"

"Do stay with us, Letty. Send the Conklings a note or something."

The girl hesitated and looked grave. "All right, I will," she said, but she took it hard; she was clouded. "How gregarious she is!" he thought. "It's everything to her!" But he was pleased by her compliance, which seemed to give good promise. He went and kissed her cheek.

She slipped her skirt off, with a clear straight de-

cisive gesture familiar to her brother. They had been used from childhood to seeing one another dress and undress; they had never thought anything of going in and out of one another's bedrooms: the difference of sex, with them, had been merged with a completeness rarer than it is supposed or pretended to be with brothers and sisters. Rather, the difference had been distilled, surely and evenly, through the whole body of their intimacy—Ah, she *was* thinner! She hinted frailness, even, and there had been nothing of frailness about her before: she had been slender and strong. This was terrible: for the first time it seemed to Lawrance really terrible. Letty caught his look as she shook out her hair:

“What’s the matter!” she cried, and her lips trembled a little; for the first time she looked frightened. “I’m not dying, old goose! And you’ll be late for dinner!”

“Of course you’re not! It’s only that I hate your being even the least little bit ill. I want you to do all you can so as to stop being that—to stop it quickly, darling, quickly! You know—”

He broke off; he couldn’t speak; he was convulsed with the emotion of his desire that she should live. All sorts of images were vivid and rapid to him at that moment of heightened feeling: Letty a child of twelve, pulling her dark-blue jersey over her tumbled thick hair: Letty at eight or nine, learning to swim with him, her brown hard little limbs gleaming in the sun: Letty in her first “party-frocks,” so pleased with them, so eager for coquetry and excitement: then, evoked from Letty as she was then, in bodice and petticoat, an image of Muriel who undressed so differently, whose way of undressing seemed always to stamp him as her husband, seemed always to have some *arrière-pensée* to which he never

could quite reconcile himself: then, an image of Olga, a seemingly disassociated image of Olga wandering in space, in ignorance of the future, feeling for it,—an image with which he had a concern that would not, could not, be defined or located. She had too much curiosity, had Olga, it wasn't normal or natural! She reflected and wondered too much; if she were there with him as Letty was, she would be waiting and wondering; she would be anxious;—she would not be shy, nor would she be friendly, nor would she be amorous. He would be at the mercy of her dreams. It was—what was it?—it was insecure— How much younger Letty was than Olga, though a good eight years older! How to account for that? Olga was spiritually stripped; he could almost shudder when he thought of her, of the things she said! It wasn't right. With Letty there was a softening and enveloping fragrancy, a spring-mist of fragrancy that possessed her and covered her up and made her safe in it. Olga was not safe, not for herself nor for any one else. He felt for the first time that Olga could be tremendously stormy. She had winter in her—ah, yes, but she had *all* the seasons, and what might she not—! He checked his thoughts; he was ashamed.

“I want you to be safe,” he said, clutching at the word, diverting his reflections. “Safe every way,” he added, half aloud.

She moved her lips, she smiled at him, she smiled with an effort. Ah, curse it, she was tired! He left her abruptly, blinking at the tears in his eyes.

CHAPTER XII

DURING the week at Malstowe Lawrance's mind had, for various disturbances, more occasions than a few. He was vexed by the casualness, the unimaginative egotism, as he saw it, of the general attitude of the neighbours towards Letty: it seemed to him that they shook limp hands with her condition, in just the same way as they shook limp hands with one another at afternoon teas and little dances. The more reflective of them, or those who did not so much disguise their feelings, quickened Lawrance's alarm no less than the others quickened his resentment. With heightened observation he noticed that this minority realized fully that his sister was "not very well," and that they were impressed by her defiance quite as much as by her justification of that discreet phrase. She justified it with a fling that sent her, for some of them, clear out of the reach of that "Poor girl! I do hope . . ." with its sympathetic sadness and sympathetic hush. She was, of course, a "poor girl" still, but more prominently, to this minority, she was a "silly girl" or a "game girl" or a "brave girl" or a "reckless" one,—or even she was "wicked." In her brother she kept on arousing alarm, indignation, admiration and affection in turn. "She doesn't care!" he repeated to himself, and then again, with a sting of tenderness and pain: "She doesn't know." "If only," he would think, "she wasn't so abominably pretty!"

He was right in the adverb. Letty's good looks did

play "abominably" into the hands of her gaiety. Every physical point she had seemed to help on her passion for excitement and pleasure,—all of it "innocent," but with male admiration of her drenching the whole texture all the time. "It's hard luck," thought Lawrance; "it's the worst kind of hard luck." He had not seen her for several months. Again and again he reflected that she was prettier than ever now she was ill.

Lawrance was disturbed, too, by recurring thoughts of Olga, by recurring desires for her; thoughts and desires that afflicted him deeply with a sense of dishonour. The dishonour was the blacker for him because Letty was ill. Towards the end of the week he had a letter from Olga, forwarded from Chiswick: "Why don't you come and see us? I want you to come. Love from Olga." And then a postscript: "I'm not sorry, but perhaps you are." She began "Dear Lorrie." She had remembered. Lawrance's senses betrayed him horribly on the spur of this little letter; his thoughts about the postscript kept at fever-heat: in what way wasn't she sorry? how, in her mind, did what she was not sorry for appear? A sudden seduction of his principles, his intellect, his judgment, overwhelmed him, even more strongly than it had on the night when he physically yielded. He went to his dressing-room and wrote: "Darling Olga, I'll come to you at once, as soon as I get home, only two or three days. I've been away—thinking always about you. I love you.—L." He put the letter in an envelope and sealed it hurriedly. Then he heard his wife's voice from the other side of the door—that other side!—asking him if he wasn't coming down to see old Colonel Conkling.

"Yes, in a moment!"

“What’s the matter?” she replied.

His tortured voice had surprised himself as well as Muriel. “Yes, what’s the matter with me?” he thought. “No control.”

He told her “Nothing; it’s all right,” forcing his tone; then he took the letter he had written and tore it up.

A hundred Colonel Conklings reared themselves mountainously before him. They walled him in, these people: a Lord Burpham, a Colonel Conkling, had only to appear, and there with them was their steely wand for conjuring. How immoveable they were, how tremendously important. . . . All that week they had walled him in, they had set him fast— “All right, I’m coming!”

The next day he wrote, stubbornly resistant both to his passion and to his inhibitions, a letter that satisfied neither:

“Dear Olga, As you see, I have been away from London. I’ll come and see you all when I’m back in a few days. I think I am sorry—I don’t know.—O. L.”

He would not have mentioned his sister for the world.

His reconciliation with Muriel did not prosper. She behaved well; she attended on his mother, affectionate to her and affectionate to Letty; tactful and quiet with him. But for all that he could not like her; he liked her much less than during the time that followed the theatre night; he caught himself in the immoral reflection that the more he was with Olga the better disposed, perhaps, he would be to his wife. Certainly he had had, immediately after his embraces of Olga, a much stronger physical attraction to Muriel than he had now. Now she hardly interested him at all, though she was far from offering him any sort of rebuff. She was still docile,—pliable, good-tempered. Lawrance censured himself for

his distaste for her, and for the causes of his distaste,—causes that sometimes seemed blackguardly, sometimes mean. She was not so well bred as his own people or their acquaintances; this was plainly seen: she was always making very little lapses, and she knew it. Her juxtaposition with these others threw her into a forgotten light for Lawrance; it was painful to him doubly, making him ashamed of her, and ashamed of himself for being ashamed. He could not help criticizing her as though she were a stranger, when he saw her with other people. At the same time he was sorry for her,—poor girl so trying to do her best,—and that hurt him too. He was sorry for her, without any of that intimate tenderness that his conscience enjoined as the right thing. Repeatedly he called her “darling”; often he thought: “Now if I knew that any one else felt like this, what a cad I should think him!” He had always been in earnest with himself, but never so thoroughly and so continuously in earnest as now.

He made harassed plans for Letty, whose gay, pretty, spirited yet not really happy nonchalance seemed every day more baffling. She always wanted to be doing something; she slid rather than chafed away from all invalid routine. She would say: “Oh, I can go; I can wear a high frock”: then she went, and wore a low one. Her former girlishly bright love of diversion seemed to have become unnaturally touched, changed to a preoccupation tarnished by stressed and secretive purpose.

Sometimes Lawrance would resolutely forget his concern for his sister, his distaste for his wife, his temptation to Olga, and the age-long fortified code that blocked his way to her; but in the relaxation of night everything crept back into his blood. He would wake strugglingly, to his same divided self.

CHAPTER XIII

BEFORE leaving Malstowe Lawrance had interviewed Doctor Peachey, and had got him to promise to write at once if Letty were any worse: to write, in any case, in a month, with a general report. A comparatively new arrival, the alert little man was almost a stranger to Lawrance, who was so far impressed by his ability that he waived for the time the project for a second opinion. Doctor Peachey was evidently on the look-out; he could be trusted. The interview was short: Lawrance was told that there was no reason, taking the case in its present character, why his sister should not remain under treatment at Malstowe; indeed it might do her more harm than good to be sent away: psychological effects had to be considered. The doctor would not commit himself to any forecast. Lawrance was relieved to see that Peachey had fully grasped the copious incapacity of his patient's mother.

The first days following their return to London passed dully and doggedly. Lawrance was stuffed to suffocation by the undigested emotions of shame and disgust. It was a moral nausea that he could not diagnose in the least: diagnosis never occurred to him. He simply suffered. He drove at his work at the Office with a forced energy that lacked any eagerness or intention. Inge could not give him enough to do. When he came back home he was silent, preoccupied with the effort not to think either about his wife or about Olga: but his blood

ran in aversion to Muriel and in active desire for the girl. The aversion was not active; he blindly wanted it to be, for his own relief: he would have had scope, then; he would not have been bound up as he was. He wished Muriel no harm; his feeling towards her was not now one of hatred; it was rather that it added to the weight he bore that she should be there: the look of her, her voice, drove him down and held him under, to the grasp of an inert horror. All the natural fluid of his feelings seemed turned to a sediment that choked him.

For his own protection he tried to keep thinking of his sister; he repeated to himself: "I'll take her away in a month, if she's not better," but the words had no meaning, no interest. His shame was driven further into him: he felt that he must have lost his affection for Letty, lost his sensitiveness. He saw himself not only as an unprincipled cad, but as a heartless brute. He lay awake at night, twinged with his formless self-distrusts: he travailed with the unnamed abortions of his senses; strove passionately towards some purgation that should bring a different and a clearer pain, a pain that some sort of expression in reason might explain and relieve. He knew, and was shocked by knowing, that he would be glad if Doctor Peachey were to write at the end of the month that Letty was worse and ought to be taken away. He longed for the clear call on his altruism that this would be. It seemed horrible to him that he should have such a wish: he was too honest not to face it, much too ethically-minded not to loathe it. At times he could almost believe that the Devil had got him,—or one of those "Elementals" about which he had written so much that they had come to be only things of pen and paper to him. He had no more faith in them than he had in

the Devil: these mediæval consolations did not serve.

He noticed that Muriel kept watching him, and not only Muriel, but the other women, the servants. Once or twice he surprised an inquisitive and sympathetic glance from Mary; his pretty parlourmaid; he was struck by the unusualness of her look, that was not, however, at all flagrantly indiscreet. The sympathetic glance of Mary gave him consolation, sudden and swift. He found himself wishing that she could know what was wrong with him; she could help him, he felt. He reached out yearning for the support of a woman's sentiments: he longed to be in this way spiritually nursed. The understanding of another, that might be a cure for his evil: if only she could be understanding without being told! Muriel's watching looks made him worse; they seemed to break up and scatter his intelligence: he felt that she was watching for herself, that her vigilance was not related to his own healing at all.

For several days he did not go to Olga, nor did he write to her. On a Sunday he started out after lunch, half decided for the Glasden Road. Muriel looked closely at him, but she said nothing. She had been, in general, calmly and expectantly silent since the Malstowe visit. Lawrance took the first tram that came up, a tram to Shepherd's Bush. When the Tube train stopped at Marble Arch he got out, on a sudden decision. He was nearly too late: the door was beginning to close, and did indeed shut out a man who was a moment later than he, a man who had started from his place in the middle of the car just after Lawrance had made his move. Lawrance, hearing expostulations, looked back from the platform and saw a little dark person with a heavy moustache and a pale face, gesturing in a restrained

authoritative manner to the conductor.— “Sorry, sir; you’ll have to get out at Bond Street and go back.” The train went on.

Lawrance walked over to the Park entrance and wandered to the forum of an atheist lecturer. “Pillar of salt!” the derisive voice assailed him. “Why didn’t he turn Lot into pepper and the other two into oil and vinegar, and make a *cruet* of it while he was abaht it!”

“Stow yer jaw, yer blasphemious worm! Gawd’ll strike you one of these days with yer tuppenny-’alfpenny lip, yer dirty owl!”

“Ow, will ’e? Wish ’e’d strike you into a gin-and-bitters, there’d be some use for you then!”

Lawrance’s grave look stayed: he responded only to the mention of gin-and-bitters: wondered if a drink would do him good, if he could be helped at all by the sympathy of alcohol. But he dismissed this idea: he associated drinking with happy moods and the collaboration of friends.

“Go *on* fer ’im! Swipe the brute!”

The words reached Lawrance from some fifty yards away. He turned, and observed a growing crowd at this distance, a crowd that was beginning to chop in ugly little uncertain uneven waves. Two or three policemen stood on the outskirts; with an air of heavy wariness, of suppressed resentment in familiarity. It seemed that the crowd belonged to them, that it was a dog on a long leash. Another policeman, in a stout binding of official neutrality, began slowly walking up from the Marble Arch Gates.

“You shut it, or you’ll get yer fice smashed!”

Lawrance walked rapidly up to the crowd. He liked his feeling of excitement. A young man was talking

over there; he wanted to know what he was talking about and why he was stirring this hostility. He could see his face clearly now, a face that was pale and of a deep-set anxious earnestness,—a long face, with prominent light-blue eyes, and a stretched thin jaw that worked with grotesque emphasis. His hair was rather long; he kept brushing it back from his forehead. He was shouting rapidly and unremittingly. Lawrance caught a few words: “I say we are being fooled!”—“They tell you your country needs you; I tell you—”

There was a banner fluttering by the young man’s head, a white banner, gilt-lettered—“Fellowship”—“Peace”—“World”—Lawrance made out. He was in the crowd now. “What’s it all about?” he asked the person next to him, and as soon as he had asked he recognized his neighbour as the dark heavy-moustached man who had not been quick enough in getting out of the Tube train.

“Oh, one of those ‘Stop the War’ fellows,” a quiet non-committal voice informed him. But the man seemed surprised, and sheered off at once.

“... all are Christian countries! Our Blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ—”

A bottle flew through the air and hit the speaker on the mouth. He put up his hand and gave a cry: the crowd saw that he was gashed, and they gave out a crowing howl of pleasure. Another missile followed immediately, but fell short at the feet of the Peace Propagandist. There was a sudden charge at the wooden platform, the chair on which the speaker was standing shot away, Lawrance caught a moment’s glimpse of the pale earnest unfrightened face dropping down. He felt he must go on into the crowd; he had no intention, but he

must go on. He thrust his way with force that gathered up to fury. The noise and the turmoil of bodies did not seem to be about him but through him and of him. He was charged with the blind turbulence of a collective will. But, mixed with him, it was not the will to destroy, but the much more characteristic will to oppose.

"The man has a right to be heard!" he called fiercely out. "Where is he?" he thought. "I must get to him."

A big loosely-built man of middle age, a man with harsh little eyes and a gross mouth, blocked the path he fought for.

"What do you think you're doing, eh?" he cried. "Do you want to make trouble for yourself?"

Lawrance, with all the violence of his nerves in his two hands, pushed the man, who fell with arms in air under a foot that trampled the edge of his slack cheek. In a fury with the pain he heaved himself up from the ground, sending a couple of youths in a flying lurch against the back of a policeman. The policeman, who had a tight clasp on one of the more vociferous rioters, stumbled and swore; he let his captive go, and drew out his truncheon.

"You look out there," he called, "or I'll give you a taste!"

"I ain't goin' to be knocked down for nothing!" the slack-faced man yelled.

He waved his arm behind his head and slung it with awkward heavy motion against Lawrance's chin; Lawrance moved his head; he was only grazed; he struck at the man's mouth, then with his other hand at his nose. The blows he gave thrilled him with their expense of his spirit: the blows he received in return were irrelevant to him; he did not consciously try to parry them. He

was struck heavily from behind on the shoulder; his knees gave, he tottered and found himself being lifted off his feet, in a swirl that was all a medley of the mental and the physical. In the distance he saw the receding face of his antagonist, a face blood-smeared, angry and alive with pain. Lawrance felt no pain and no anger: only a spreading satisfaction and relief.

"Keep off there! 'Aven't yer 'ad enough of it?" A robust-looking man, with an agreeable competent face with resonant features, was keeping the people off Lawrance. "You git aht, young feller; that's the best thing you can do."

"Where's that man who was talking?"

"A cop got 'im all right. Don't you worry." The crowd was scattering now; the police were making further arrests. "You tike my tip and git off quick, or the cop'll pinch you too. They've enough to do now with them that's up front. You tike my tip—git along to the Lavatory and striten yerself up a bit."

"That man had a right to be heard!"

"G'arn! Cat-ficed blighter, 'e is. Ought to be put in a lunatic asylum. One of them cowardly sniffers."

"He wasn't a coward!"

"Look 'ere, you come along with me."

The man welcomed the opportunity for authoritative benevolence. He put his arm in Lawrance's and walked him off. Lawrance, suddenly passive, yielded to him. From a neighbouring booth of Evangelism "God be merciful to me a sinner!" struck his ears with a shock.

"We don't want to 'ear our boys in Flanders called fools fer goin', see? More'n flesh an' blood can stand—'Ow abaht gittin' into khaki yerself, my lad, if you must be scrappin'?"

"I wish I could." Lawrance's mind came back to him in a leap: he was struck by the sincerity of his answer, by the fact that he had not felt like that before. "Doctor said no use my trying," he added.

"Ow." They went on in silence till they reached the Public Lavatory.

"Now 'ere's the plice for you. What you want is tuppence worf of wash and brush-up."

Lawrance thanked him: he went in and followed the advice.— As he began washing, his brain started into violent motion. Why had he wanted to be in the war? One ought to want to fight on principle; he didn't. He had no principles; there was something altogether wrong with him; he thought only of himself. He grew more conscious of his physical pain; his face and his left shoulder hurt him: the pain kept coming on, but it seemed merely to trifle with his body. He washed, hurting himself more, but always insignificantly.— Suppose he could fight against the war,—like that earnest young man with his religious daring,—that would do just as well, he knew. It must be that he cared nothing for great causes: no, and affections were nothing to him, either; nothing in comparison with what might help and relieve him. How base of him to contemplate the use of Letty's illness for himself! Yet he was fond of his sister; he did love her. He was fond of old Flynn and his "Patsey," too: it was hateful that they, as well, should shrink to this same insignificance. Why should the slender dangerous hands of that girl push everything out of sight?— His lips would not stop bleeding. "I must go to a chemist's," he thought, "and get something for my mouth." "*My* mouth"! He hated the word "*my*": it seemed to bring him up so horribly close to

himself. He patted his beaten face with a towel; more and more he was appalled by his own paltriness, by his lack of generosity, his lack of principle. Looking at his swollen ugly mouth, at his bunged eye, he thought again of Olga; he thought of how he had kissed and held her. "Oh, this means more to you than your country or your sister!" He did not so feelingly reproach himself with regard to his wife, in spite of the demands of his code. He had an unadmitted conviction that the bond between himself and Muriel was unfair: and she was not real to him as Letty was, or as England. England had a strange indispensable claim; England was deep in his life. Yet this wretched illicit passion for a young girl was the most important thing of all.

Lawrance ceased to feel his physical pain. He tried to pray, there over a wash-basin in the Public Lavatory of Marble Arch. "God be merciful to me a sinner!"—"I will try to be good!" he resolved, in the phrase of childhood. Then he was overwhelmed by horrible nausea, he stumbled from the basin, with his hands clutching his stomach. He fainted in the closet, in the midst of his vomiting. . . . His consciousness returned to him in a vile filtration, tainted through and through by all the horrid spilth in which he was. He opened his eyes and groaned. "I am like this," he thought.

CHAPTER XIV

LITTLE patches of blackness kept obscuring Lawrence's senses at intervals as he went back to Chiswick. After going to a chemist's he took a cab, rather from consideration for Muriel than for himself. He was too much withdrawn for stares to disturb him, but it would make his wife uncomfortable, he knew, the exposure of his damaged and plastered face in Tubes and trams.

The weariness of explaining his condition to Muriel came dully to him now and again; he wondered idly how she would take it, but he did not care. All that was a waste of time.

The first person that he saw in the house was the pretty parlour-maid. He resisted the impulse to hide his face from her as he walked upstairs, and she looked up at him, startled and grave. "Oh, sir!"

"It's all right, Mary."

"Couldn't I do anything for you, sir? Shall I go and tell mistress?" The girl's lip quivered.

"Yes. I'm going to my room."

He went on up, feeling a malicious physical pressure on his heart, a pressure that sent twisted waves through his head. He walked stubbornly to his room and fell on his bed. The pain grew much worse; in his shoulder it was especially acute. He was parched, not only in his mouth, but in all his body. He longed for water, but could not get up to reach the carafe from his washstand.

Very soon the maid Mary tapped at his door. He did not answer, but she came in without tapping again.

"Mistress is out, sir," she said. Then, as he did not speak: "Is there anything I could do?"

"Yes, I want some water."

The pain of his shoulder and his intermittent giddiness were violently distressing to him, but the sight of the girl, as she crossed the room, was a help, a release. She was made so softly yet so firmly, the movement of her body seemed sympathetic with such a curious meaning, she was utterly a woman . . . willing in service, drawing her power from just that will. . . . Again Lawrance wondered why he had not noticed her more. What pretty hair, what pretty colour!

"Hadn't I better go and get you some fresh, sir?" She hesitated by the washstand. "Or shall I bring you the giraffe?"

Lawrance was seized by a panic of laughter. "The giraffe" seemed to him tormentingly funny, far funnier than anything he had ever heard in his life. "The giraffe!" His laughter hurt him; he rocked and gurgled and groaned, but he had to laugh on. The maid stood, astounded. It was the first time she had ever seen him laugh, except in a perfunctory way. The master was not easily amused; he was not at all a humorous gentleman. But now, when he was ill, to be carrying on like this! It must be hysterics, like. . . .

"Yes," he gasped; "bring it to me. Bring me the—"

He laughed again. Only his urgent desire to drink checked him. The water tasted like and unlike itself, as though it had tried to be water and partially failed. Lawrance was reminded of his sensations some years ago, in smoking the first cigarette after an abstinence of

several weeks: he had broken himself gradually and pertinaciously of the habit, because of his heart. The tobacco had tasted like and unlike itself, in something the same way.

He handed the carafe back to the girl. "I don't like it much, Mary," he told her.

"Should I get some barley-water for you, sir?" She was eager and nervous, her quick look at him had in it curiosity, tenderness and admiration, all mingled embarrassingly for her.

"Yes, do."

Lawrance's attention fixed itself to the girl's hand, with its plump pleasant fingers. So much a woman's hand, it was,—a caressing, reassuring hand, not a troubling hand like Olga's. It made him feel safe, and right. He tried to believe that it did not mean so much less than that other. His pain quickened; he took the hand in his, and the girl blushed crimson. She looked away, and so did her master.

"I got mixed up, you see, in a sort of a riot in Hyde Park. Crowd got out of hand. A regular fight. Couldn't be helped."

As he went on telling her what had happened, he was more in ease and contentment. His conscience gave him no trouble, for it could not accuse him of being physically stirred. There was nothing "wrong" in this, he felt sure, because there was nothing of sex as he thought of sex. He was extraordinarily gratified by the girl's liking him; above everything else just then he wanted to be *liked* by a woman. It seemed that Mary's liking for him made the air tender to his head and his body. He was grateful and fond, and he had the sense of a gratefulness and fondness in her, forthgoing to gentle

union. Yet every minute his stiffness and soreness were more imperative.

"I'm so sorry!" Her fingers twitched in his hand. "Ought I to do something to the bandage?"

"No, Mary—thank you. The man said leave them till to-morrow."

"I'd get the barley-water, if you wished, sir."

"I'd rather you stayed."

She was not in the same way embarrassed now, but she kept thinking apprehensively of her mistress and of the other servants. Her pleasure went in disturbed flickers; she was puzzled and unprepared.

"I'd better not,—sir," she tentatively answered. Hearing a rapid step on the stair, she released her hand from his light clasp. The step came nearer. As she went to the door, she gave herself a little shake, and a little pat to her hair under her cap. "I'll get cook to make the barley-water, sir," she said gravely, opening the door, and confronting, as she knew she would, her mistress.

Muriel, in outdoor dress, went straight into the room, taking no notice of the servant. "Why, Doll!" she cried. The door closed. "What has happened?"

She sat by him on the bed and took his hand. He winced from her. She looked at him, frightened, and her lip drew down. His face was bitter and stubborn; he was resenting his pain and resenting her, who seemed to be in the tide of his pain to strengthen the surge of it.

"It's nothing much, really," he exclaimed sharply.

Muriel, still looking at him, collapsed with sudden tears. Her husband stared at her, even more resentfully. "How unfair she is!" he thought. He wished brutally that she would cover her face.

"Oh, Muriel!" He took his peevish stand on his prerogative as an invalid. "I do wish you wouldn't! Don't make it worse by making a fuss!" She sobbed still, but now she hid her face: she put up her hand defensively from him. "It's nothing," he went on angrily. "I got into a fighting crowd in the Park. All right in a day or two. Why, think of the thousands of men who're being seriously wounded!" He felt a small pride in himself as he said this. "I tell you I'll be able to get to the Office to-morrow!"

"Oh, it isn't *that*!"

"Well, what, then?"

She turned from him, shaking, unable to speak. Her sobs drove faster, under sickening impetus; and then were blended with a racking pseudo-laughter that frightened Lawrance away from his rage and his artificial brutality.

"What is it?" he cried, steadying himself.

She raised her head and looked at him again. Her small mouth had a twist of wretchedness, a twist that was naïve and weak and helpless. She looked like a punished unhappy child.

"It's because"—she began to cry again—"it's because you don't—love me—any more—and I'm lonely!"

"It isn't true!" he declared violently. He was staggered by the indecency of her words. Then he softened, remembering how sometimes she had tried to please him,—how she had cried once when he had been angry with her for some little thoughtless repeated annoyance. "I *will* try to remember!" she had said.— "Of course I love you, Magsie. Something's the matter with you that you imagine things like that. Of course I love you as much as ever!"

"No, you don't."

"Oh,—and since when?"

"I don't know." Her blue eyes had a curious strained wide look. "But these last days I've been sure—ever since—ever since—"

"Well, ever since *what?*"

"Since I've known I'm going to have a baby! There!" She turned from him again.

"Good Lord! Now!"

"Are you glad?" She hardly heard him: she asked the question with which she was prepared.

"Yes; yes, of course I'm glad— Give me a kiss, Magsie," he said in a false voice.

He was bewildered, divided between what he felt and what he thought he ought to feel: tortured by the division, and by the emergence of this new thing upon the field held by his other experiences. This new thing was clashing there; it didn't fit in; he couldn't place it.

"I can't reach you," he went on. "I'm in pain, you know. Oh—curse it! Of course I'm glad. I hope it will be a girl."

"Why?"

"Because men—oh, well, I think there's something wrong with men. There's something wrong with me, I know."

"I'm glad. I shall have *it*, anyhow." She spoke with a hectic feeble savageness: he found it more and more impossible to understand either the event or her. "You wouldn't like it, you know you wouldn't. Oh, it isn't *fair!*"

"Like *what?*" He groaned with the pain of his hurt shoulder. "I say," he went on, as she didn't answer, "couldn't you get me some kind of a sleeping-draught?"

It hurts like fury, really it does. We'll have a talk about everything later on. I can't now. I don't see why you—" He pulled himself up: "But I mustn't blame her," he thought, with a petty access of scruple. "This really isn't quite the time, you know," he forbearingly added.

"Oh, but it has to do with it! It's all the same."

"I don't understand."

"I mean your getting hurt—your getting into this row. You wouldn't have, if there hadn't been something else,—something—"

"Oh, come now, Magsie, that's absurd!"

"Yes, I know it's silly of me to say it, but it's true, all the same!"

"Magsie, dear, do be a good girl— What pretty stockings you've got on!"

She drew her skirt down with the same defensive movement that she had used before.

"It doesn't matter! That doesn't matter any more!"

"Oh, my dear child!" He didn't know what to say. He lay there inert and exposed: behind his temples he was all burning and confused.

"Suppose the baby doesn't make any difference. I don't feel it will make any. It's all funny and different, but it's not what I thought— You thought I didn't love you, Doll, because I didn't—because I didn't show it so much in *that* way. I couldn't help it—you know people can't help how they are.— You didn't understand. You didn't try to—you weren't very jealous."

"'Jealous'?"

"I didn't mean 'jealous,' I meant 'generous.' I suppose I said 'jealous' because that was what I was thinking,—only I'm jealous, not you. I wish you were!"

“Oh, don’t let’s talk any more now! I can’t, really—!”

“It’s only because I wanted to tell the truth.” She got up. She was much calmer. She looked old, all her bloneness seemed faded. “I couldn’t stand not saying anything, I couldn’t stand it any longer. When I saw you like that, I felt I *had* to— It was inconsiderate, I know, but I had to. It didn’t seem right to the child to keep it all there shut up with him. And I mightn’t ever have told you, if I hadn’t now. It was awful at Malstowe.” The words seemed to drag through her; she stood there looking in some sort violated, as though her conventions, her domesticity, had been raped. She seemed improperly stripped. Lawrance was sorry for her, but resentful of her still. Grief and unrest did not harmonize with her aspect: they ruthlessly scattered her pretty flaxens and pinks and blues, tarnished them and left them sordid. Her emotions put her physically in the wrong. They gave her features an accent that was harsh and thin. “I did try to be what you would like, but it wasn’t any good,—though I was nice to your mother and everybody, wasn’t I, Doll? And all the time I was so dreadfully jealous—jealous of that girl. I knew you were always thinking about her. It wasn’t right to be as jealous as I was. I was all ugly inside with jealousy. It was terrible. And I’m jealous still, just the same. I was even jealous of Mary,—in a different way. Well, when we were at Malstowe—” She went rapidly on, in a tone that was painful in agitation instead of being painful in slowness. “When we were there I wrote to Father, all about it. It was a horrid letter; it wasn’t what I felt at all. I couldn’t write as

I felt. I'm ashamed. I have to tell you—and I'll never do that again! And then I—”

She broke off and went instantly out, leaving Lawrence in a morass of unintelligibility. He turned over painfully and groaned. “What can I do?” he thought. “I can't do anything.” And then: “I must go away: I must clear out, somehow.” He was utterly baffled by his wife being new in this way, by her being another person. If only he could escape, somehow! His imagination could not at all reach to the child that was coming. He forced himself to think of the child, but there was no meaning in his thoughts. It should have made some difference, but it hadn't. The room grew suddenly dim; he swam in that feverous dimness, and was effaced.

CHAPTER XV

LAWRANCE'S night was broken by wakefulness and pain and dreams. He dreamed that he was walking along a wide street, a street with a smooth jet-black pavement and a grey smooth asphalt road. No one else was there; on either side there was a high grey wall, beyond which nothing could be seen: wall and street stretched on into a darkness that receded by arbitrary little strokes, irregularly as he advanced. Everything was in a half-light; he was walking rapidly, feeling that he would be stopped, as, suddenly, he was, but not by any person. A thick rope-like substance was coiling itself round his head and shoulders, keeping him back: he was held fast, thickly and heavily, about his mouth and his eyes; his shoulder would not move; it was enormously weighted down by the coils that seemed to grow out of it. A creature with a man's face and a dark-blue hairy body fell on his head: he was on the ground, and the ground was loosened and brittle with heat; he felt he must fall through it under this fierce pressure from above. The creature's face was white-fleshed and loose, full of evil for him: he tried to cry "Go away!" but his mouth was so huge and heavy he could not open it. The ground dropped beneath him, and he clung to the hairy body, which slipped from him, while the white face turned to a fist which waved round him and then melted. Again the street was there, but it was narrow

now; he felt wedged in it. His body was puffed out into monstrous jutting ridges. Letty stood poised before him; she laughed and stretched out her hand, which he tried to take, but she too slipped from him. He saw her on a narrow ledge, dancing along it. Muriel came from behind, with a doll which she held out in front of her: she dropped it and picked it up and dropped it again. Then it was not a doll, but a drawing on a sheet of paper which fluttered over his head and disappeared. Muriel turned away. The street widened again; Olga was there far on the other side, moving slowly. She seemed to pass through Muriel, who was at once obliterated; then, still slowly moving on, she looked at Lawrance. Her face was suddenly near him; he tried to touch her; then she was far off. He felt himself dragged away from her, all the bulk about him became heavily but irresistibly motive; he was dragged on, pressing against the wall that hurt him. Olga, all in white, passed backwards and forwards, still slowly, on the other side of the widened street. Her face was turned from him. His dragging motion ceased; he felt an expansion and a breaking up of his knotted ridges. He had to go on quickly; he would be too late. He must be in time. Olga was in front of him now; she was crossing water that he thirsted for; she was in a single garment of white, blowing about above her knees. Muriel was with her, holding the girl's hands and crying. He wanted to see Olga's face, but he couldn't: and the bare knees seemed not to be Olga's, but Muriel's. He must go on to her quickly. He was nearer; he struggled to reach her; his anxiety was maddening. Muriel had released Olga; Olga was nearer to him. He strained on in a treble agony of desire and pain and fear. Then she was in his arms and

pressed to him. He held her in doubtful joy, joy shot through with physical pain and the anxiety that still tormentingly teased his blood: her hand drove his shoulder fiercely,—drove into the bone,—her childlike slenderness was attenuated, and quivered through him. He woke in an ecstasy that was immediately followed by a wakeful shame. His shoulder hurt him ferociously; the compress had slipped from it. He was parched, and reached out for the barley-water by his side. He drank in great gulps.

Later he slept again, with dreams more incoherent, and twice he woke after dropping down and down through blackness. At about seven o'clock he woke finally, with a sense of freshness and relief: the hot tide seemed to have drawn back from him. He felt an agreeable desire for food, and ate with an almost happy greed of the bread-and-milk that he had not been able to touch overnight. He began to dress himself, with a determination that his body resisted; he was stiffer than ever. Several times he sat down, weak with pain, and his shoulder hindered him. He looked at his face, with the oily lint bandage that had slipped to the side of his eye; he observed his plastered and swollen mouth and the rich dark colour of his bruised cheek. He sat in a chair, with a hand-glass. His face was like a dirty yellow cloth, claret-stained: perhaps it would be better not to go to the Office for a day or two. He must have something to eat.

He went downstairs. The post had come: there was a letter for Muriel from her father, and a letter for him from Lord Burpham; he opened this at once. It was an invitation to him to "run down with his sister" to Lip-

scot on the following Saturday. "My cousin Crockerton Deavitt will be there then. . . . I hope your sister is by now quite well enough to come. . . ."

Lawrance looked at the other envelope: he wondered if Muriel would show him her father's letter. He wondered if he would show Lord Burpham's letter to her. Why should he, though? Of course he couldn't go to Lipscot with Olga. The thing was impossible. Suppose Olga had been his wife, though: how different everything would be then! You had only one life; why wasn't it possible to strike out and make it what you wished? He was in some way fatally weak, that was the real truth: he had never directed his determination; he had chopped it up and wasted it over little things,—little things like giving up smoking and not reading late in bed. He—

Mary came in to set the table for breakfast. She was shy and repressed.

"I hope you're feeling better, sir."

Lawrance, as she spoke, wondered why she was shy, then he remembered. He told her yes, but he was hungry. Would she get him some bacon at once, and some tea?— He felt that he must have great draughts of weak tea.

The girl went, and Lawrance sat down at the table: he sat down heavily; he was still rather bewildered. He supposed he ought not to have taken Mary's hand like that: no, it was not the right thing to have done. Everything was against it: why had he? And Muriel was going to have a child. Mary was their servant; she evidently was concerned by his having held her hand. It meant something to her. He thought, for a moment,

vividly, of her cap and apron . . . a servant . . . he felt uncomfortable. It seemed that there was something in him that made him behave like a cad. . . .

He had just begun his bacon, when Muriel appeared. She came and kissed him, with uneasy gaiety. "I can hardly find a place to kiss!" she cried. "I must freshen those bandages. You do look better, though. Hungry?"

"Yes, awfully. I'm all right now."

"You won't go to the Office to-day, though, will you? What kind of a night did you have?"

"Pretty fair. A bit of fever, I should think. Dreamt a lot— No, I shan't go to the Office. Wish I could do something to change my looks quickly— It's beastly, isn't it?"

"It must be for you. I don't mind it— Oh, there's a letter from Father." She flushed, and they were both silent.

"You might read it to me," he said at last, deliberately.

"Oh, I'm sure it's not interesting. You know what Father's letters are!" Her evasion was so inexpert that he was sorry for her. Curious, he reflected, how very often he had been sorry for her these last few weeks. "You've got a letter, too," she went on hurriedly; "is that interesting?"

Lawrance had unintentionally left his letter on the table. Mary had put it out of his mind.

"Not very interesting," he said, but in the pause that followed he made up his mind, with all the determination that he had been accusing himself of wasting on trifles, not to take his cue from her. She had evaded

and withheld, he would not. "It's from Lord Burpham," he added, knowing that this would pique her curiosity.

"Oh! on business?"

"No, it isn't a business letter."

"Oh, I thought your relations with Lord Burpham were purely business ones. You always told me—"

He had always told her so:— "Oughtn't I to know Lord Burpham, if you do?"— "My dear girl, I'm purely on a business footing with him." Or, if he were annoyed: "You don't expect me to ask him to dinner, do you?" She had never accepted this: she always thought, and let him see that she thought, that he might have managed things somehow, that other men would have. It was a sore point with her. "I used to meet lots of people of that sort at home!" she had said. Lawrance knew that she would be bitterly chagrined about that letter, but it was inevitable now that she should read it.

"Lord Burpham's written to me on a misunderstanding," he said. "Read it."

She did, and looked extremely puzzled and vexed.

"He oughtn't to ask you and Letty without me! It isn't—it isn't well-bred!"

"Oh, Lord Burpham's breeding is all right. He doesn't know I'm married; he doesn't realize it, anyhow."

"What, you haven't even told him!"

"No, there hasn't been any occasion. Inge or Ralston may have—I don't know. But, anyhow, he's evidently forgotten. Of course I'm not going."

"He didn't forget you had a sister. You must have

told him that.— He's a widower, isn't he?" she added, as though that made the matter rather less of an offence to her.

"Yes."

"If there'd been a Lady Burpham, she'd never have let him write like that, without making sure. She'd know how a woman would feel— Why, it's a regular slap in the face!"

"Oh, he didn't mean it to be, not in the least."

"How are you going to answer?"

"I don't know— I can easily put him off."

"But, Doll dear, you can't just put him off. It wouldn't be dignified; it wouldn't be fair to me.— I know what it is; you don't want me to come with you! You think I—" She broke off, very much agitated.

"Well, what do you think I ought to write?"

"I should have thought you would have known!"

"Well, how would you put it? You understand these things better than I do." He was gaining time, thinking how he should tell her about his "sister" when from her present preoccupation she came to that point.

"Oh, you can easily put it quite simply and naturally—in a dignified friendly way.— 'Many thanks for your kind invitation'—of course you'd begin like that—'which was evidently given under a—a misapprehension.' " She spoke in a little pedantic voice. "'Which I am quite sure was given under a misapprehension'—that's better.— 'I should have told you that I am married.' "

"That sounds—well, it sounds rather silly. Why should I have told him?"

"Well, I think any one else would have!"

"Why? I've hardly ever seen Lord Burpham except at the Office."

"But why did you tell him about Letty, then? Does he know Letty?"

"No, he doesn't know Letty. I took Olga Flynn to the 'Trafalgar' for her birthday the other night, and we met Lord Burpham there by chance. I introduced her as my sister."

"Oh, how *horrid* of you!" Her voice sounded sharply, at a high nervous angry pitch. She was flushed, and her light eyes shone in contraction.

"I don't defend myself."

"Well, it shows you were ashamed of being with her!"

"Not exactly. It shows I was ashamed of what he might think."

"You oughtn't to have taken her, Oliver! It wasn't fair . . . and I can't believe that Lord Burpham asked a girl like that to come to Lipscot—"

"Obviously he has. He rather liked her."

"And you could take her!"

"I've told you I'm not going— What's the matter?" She had turned suddenly pale, her mouth was drawn and weak.

"I don't feel well!"

"Take some hot tea— Here."

"I can't touch anything." She pushed the cup peevishly. "It's not right, the way you treat me!"

"I haven't seen the Flynnns since Olga's birthday."

"You're always doing things for them! Getting them money for silly things about seeing ghosts!— Doll, will you promise me you won't see them again?" She spoke with a sick frightened rush.

"I can't promise that."

"You're fond of that girl, I know you are! You're

fond of her in a horrid way! You'd never have said she was your sister, if you hadn't had a guilty conscience!" She began to cry. "You've been making love to her, haven't you?"

"Yes: once I did."

"I knew that was the kind of girl she was!"

"She isn't that kind of girl!" He spoke now with animation, and Muriel suffered her bitterest shock. "She's absolutely innocent!" he added with dangerous emphasis.

"Innocent! When she lets you make love to her! Oh, don't look at me in that way!" She hid her face. "I'm so ill and sick and miserable with it all!" She rose, turned quickly away from him.

"Muriel! I'm awfully sorry, I am really— Don't go."

"I must. Suppose Mary should come in."

He got up and went to her. "Look here, Muriel—"

"Don't look at me! I can't stand it!" She trembled. She suffered again from the violation of her reserve, suffered from being stripped and shown. The very strength of her feeling humiliated her.

"Look here, my dear girl, I don't want this, I really don't!"

"But you won't promise me!"

"You know I can't drop the Flynns.— Don't let's go all over that again."

"You do everything for them—that thing in your paper about the 'Elementals'—just to get them money—all because of that girl—"

"It's not. I'm friends with all of them—"

"Well, will you promise not to make love to her—?" He was silent, and she went on with a pitiful weak

energy: "I don't see why you shouldn't promise. It isn't much to ask. You might—you don't know how much it means to me. It's all so shameful." She put out her arms to him with a pretty, timid gesture: her head was on his shoulder, he stood in passive resentment of the prompted embrace. "Oh, Doll, I should have thought that what I told you last night might have made some difference. I suppose I'm getting old and ugly—but I do love you—you don't know! It's awfully hard—"

Lawrance was acutely uncomfortable, and indignant. He felt he was being tricked, but he could not answer according to his feeling. For one thing, he had strongly the sense of her being propped by a support that he could not undermine or defy: for another, he was sure that there was no blame to her here personally, he saw the futility of holding her to any account. Their living together, it was that that was wrong, but yet inevitable, so far as any power of his went. He caught his breath.

"Oh, his poor shoulder!" She released him.

"No, it's the other one— Well, all right, I promise you." He went back to the table and continued to eat his bacon.

She did her best in the look of gratitude she gave him, the look he did not see. Embarrassed by the difficulty of taking the right tone after his capitulation, she sat down and began sipping her tea.

"How does he sign himself?" she said, with a domestic brightness, looking at Lord Burpham's letter. "What a funny slopey hand! Is that a 'J'?" She pushed the sheet over to him.

"No, that's the loop of the 'B.' He signs himself simply 'Burpham.' They always do, you know."

"Oh, I know *that!*" She gave a little playful laugh. "You think I don't know anything!" She played listlessly with a piece of dry toast, hoping he would notice her. "I'm so glad you're making a good breakfast, dear," she said. "A penny for your thoughts!"

"They aren't worth it."

The dulness of his answer oppressed him: and his reflection that Olga could never have said anything like that "Penny for your thoughts!" oppressed him too—made him feel peculiarly bound. What had been in his mind when Muriel thus challenged him with the amicable commonplace that she could not possibly help, was the obvious and futile rejoinder to her "Oh, I know *that!*": "Why did you ask if the letter was a 'J,' then?" It was appalling, the gross dulness of the answers she suggested: spoken, or in his mind, their clogging weight on him was equal. Why should they have to live together? He could not help angrily feeling that it was not right to put the enormous strain of constant familiarity upon any affection, any passion. Yet it was always done—it must be the only way. Anyhow, she would never let him go. His whole being ached with her tenacity of him.

"You ought to eat something more." He said what she wanted him to say, at last.

"I *can't*, dear." She charged the words with a meaning modesty. "It's no good *trying*, you know.—Hadn't you better telephone to the Office?"

"Oh, I'm going."

"What? Oh, Doll, you aren't fit to go—really!"

"I feel all right. I want to go."

They both got up. She hesitated, but having won

his promise, she was free to follow her instinct not to thwart him.

“I’ll freshen your bandages, then, and make you more presentable.”

“All right. Thank you. I haven’t much time, though.”

He was near real hatred of her now: nearer than he had ever been before. The promise that she had made him give ate steadily into him. He did not allow himself to count it against her, but he would not force his will, to forgive her, and he would not force his principles, to forgive himself.

CHAPTER XVI

SOME days later, when his cuts and bruises were no longer so impertinent to him, when it was he himself, rather than they, who appeared in his face, Lawrance visited the Flynns. He had told Muriel he was going, and she accepted the fact with a certain embarrassment, a trifle of awkwardness. There was something rather disingenuous in her artificially bright: "Oh, well then, I shall have high tea, and Mary can take the evening!" No allusion had been made to that promise since its extortion. Muriel had been sedulously attentive to her husband's hurts: compresses and rubbings with embrocation bore her nightly witness. Lawrance wondered occasionally how it was possible for two people to live so intimately together, and yet not once to exchange any word or any emotion of the least importance. At any rate they had sometimes before exchanged emotions, if never ideas. But Muriel was doing her best—again she was "trying." She had been equally sedulous in her sympathy over the letters that came from Malstowe, neutral and uninformative though those letters invariably were. Lawrance thought forbiddenly of Olga, of how differently she would take him if they were married—but if it came to ideas, what, after all, he reflected, had he to give her? He was conscious of complete intellectual sterility; no wonder he couldn't satisfy Olga's urgent young mind, no wonder Olga didn't love him! If

she did, he averred fiercely, he would never have given that promise, it would have been disloyalty, it would have been vile: but as it was, he had only enacted a penalty for himself.

He was going over this ground again on his way from the Office to the Glasden Road. His meditations were always recurrent, and in their recurrence they hardly varied at all.

This time Marjorie did not run out to meet him. He heard her shrill little voice, pitched to a tone of delighted excitement, as he opened the gate: "Oh, Mr. *Deavitt*! Don't, Mr. *Deavitt*!" Lawrance felt annoyed with the little girl's preoccupation. He would have liked her to have come out to meet him. That would have made it easier. His heart beat violently, seeming hostile to him. He had anticipations of evil: there was no poetic surge of pain and passion to carry him on. As he entered, the nonchalantly sordid house did not reassure him.

Doris opened the door. "Oh, Mr. Lawrance," she said affectedly, "you're quite a stranger!" She looked over-worked; kitchen worries seemed to hang about her. "Had a good time in the country?" She put on, as usual, her Society air. She looked at him curiously, noticing the traces of his bruises. "Mr. *Deavitt*'s here, playing about with Marjorie. He's daft on that kid."

"Now then, Margarine, if you can't behave better than that, you'd better not behave at all!" came Mr. *Deavitt*'s voice from the dining room.

"Oo-er! Let me go, Mr. *Deavitt*! I must go and say how d'ye do to uncle Lorrie!"

"Don't trouble, Marjorie," Lawrance called to her. "You'll see me soon enough. Where are the others, Doris?"

"Mother isn't very well. Uncle Tofty's been awful lately. Mother's been in bed to get out of his way, I think," the girl whispered. "I've had all the work here to do as well as my work at the 'Tivoli.' I haven't hardly been out of the blessed house the whole week, except—"

"Well, I never!" Mr. Crockerton Deavitt suddenly appeared by them, with Marjorie seated on his neck, her thin legs dangling over his shoulders. "Well, I never! Here's the gentleman what's come to see Pappa about the kitchen sink!" Changing his tone, he addressed Lawrance. "I've seen you down at Ralston & Inge's, haven't I?"

They shook hands, and Marjorie nearly upset herself in her effort to kiss Lawrance from her eminence.

"Bad dog!" cried Mr. Deavitt. "Don't do that, or I shall be jellyhouse!"

Lawrance recognized that Deavitt was right. He had seen him at the Office once, and the man's appearance was not easily forgotten. He had a slight figure and a rather small head, but his expanded active blue eyes and heavy light-yellow moustache were conspicuous features.

"Of course you know old 'Israfel,'—Titmarsh. They live just round the corner here."

"Old Israfel's got six little girls!" Marjorie shouted. "Mr. Deavitt's an awful flirt! He's been there this afternoon, and then he comes to see me. I *like* that, uncle Lorrie, don't you? Mr. Deavitt says I'm number fifty-three. Cheek, I call it!"

"Such language! My word!"

"Well, you said it first. Uncle Lorrie, you've got a black eye!"

"Ssh!" Mr. Deavitt affected profound gravity, and

held up his hand to his mouth. "Scrapping with the missus. They all do it, you know. What a life! But they get a half-day off now and again, pore fellers. Keep qui-ert, Fido!" Marjorie was wriggling her lean little legs, now tightly encased in a stout new pair of brown stockings.

"Oh, Marjie, you *are* tiresome!" Doris put in peevishly.

"I've heard of you from Lord Burpham." Mr. Deavitt again addressed Lawrance with the surprising alternation of a tone of polite and affable acquaintance. "Quite interesting those alterations he's been making down at Lipscot, aren't they? We must have a talk about them some time. Wo-ah, Marjorie! No, please sir, if it's all the same to you, sir," he went on in falsetto, "gran'ma says will you come and do the plumbing next Thursday, coz Mamah's out charring, and Papah's gone round the corner to have his tooth out, and our old cat's got kittens, and little brother Archibald's fallen downstairs and broken his epigastrium. That will be all for the present, *thank* you!"

Doris turned away with a disdainful air. Marjorie, screaming with nervous laughter, gasped out: "Oh, Mr. Deavitt, you *are* silly!"

"Don't Mansion-House it!"

"Oh, you're pricking!"

"Nortiboy." Mr. Deavitt slapped his own hand. "My mistake. Show the gentleman in, Ermyntrude," he addressed Doris; "don't keep him lying out there on the doormat! Such manners!"

Doris elaborately took no notice. "Won't you come and talk to us in the kitchen, Mr. Lawrance?" she said. "Olga's there."

"All right."

"I'm sure Mr. Deavitt and Marjorie will be quite happy together. They've got puzzles and things to amuse them." The girl spoke vindictively. "Father will be back soon. We're getting the tea."

"By the way— Down, Fido!— Get down a minute, Marjorie, there's a good kid." Mr. Deavitt's tone was now alert and efficient. He took out a little pocket-diary and referred to it. "I'm booked for Lipscot to-morrow—11:35 train. I understood you were coming with your sister."

"Yes, Lord Burpham asked me—but not for to-morrow. Anyhow, it's off."

"Oh." Deavitt seemed displeased. His tone was cold and disappointed. Lawrance was not aware of his peculiar punctilio about engagements. "That's rather odd, isn't? I thought it was all fixed up."

"No. I wrote to say I couldn't come."

Lawrance moved towards Doris. He was irked by this emphasis of the Lipscot invitation, though on the whole he had not been at all ill-pleased by Deavitt's being there, and so very definitely there, on that particular afternoon. Deavitt represented a complete neutrality, he was relievingly dissociated from all Lawrance's concerns.—That allusion to "the missus" and married life—it was incomparably remote. Besides, Deavitt was easy: his clowning did not in the least irritate Lawrance, who always liked being with men who took the centre of the stage and made no call on him for conversation.

"Mr. Deavitt!" Marjorie called from the dining-room. "The little ball keeps on running away; I can't make it go properly!"

"Your lady-love wants you, Mr. Deavitt," observed

Doris sarcastically. "Come along to Olga," she whispered, putting her plump hand on Lawrance's arm. "Olga thinks a lot of you," she added in a tone of meretricious confidence as she took him away.

That allusion to Lipscot, in making Lawrance feel uncomfortable, had lessened his reluctance to go to the kitchen. Besides, what else, he thought as he went, could he do? He couldn't attend upon the innocent flirtation of Marjorie and Mr. Crockerton Deavitt.

"He doesn't really know that lord, does he?" asked Doris sceptically.

"Oh, yes, he's his cousin."

Doris did not answer. She looked impressed, puzzled and annoyed, at the same time. She had always consoled herself by the opinion that Mr. Deavitt was excessively vulgar.

"Olga knows Lord Burpham, too," Lawrance added, without weighing his words.

"Oh! She never told me. She's a sly one!—Olga! Why didn't you tell me you knew Lord Burpham?"

The girl started as her sister burst in. Seeing Lawrance, she gave him a faint abstracted smile. She was sitting reading a paper-covered book.

"Well, why didn't you?" Doris had only paused for a moment.

"I thought you'd talk so much about it."

"Talk? Why should I talk?" Doris was intensely angered by this reply, partly because it was evidently given without any desire to score off her: so she had no climbing-ground to any point of vantage for reprisals. She stopped, she was baffled. Lawrance had never seen her nearly so baffled nor nearly so angry before. The very sensible novelty of her emotions served even to dis-

tract his attention from Olga: for a few moments he ceased to wonder if she would come and kiss him. "I'm sure I don't see why you should be ashamed of knowing—of knowing—"

Doris broke off. There was humiliation and jealousy in her anger. Lawrance was increasingly surprised. He couldn't at all understand it. Olga apparently was not trying to understand. She went on reading her book.

"Reading!" cried her sister. "You're always reading. I have to do everything. What do you suppose we're going to have for tea to-night?"

"Cold mutton, isn't it?"

The younger girl gave a momentary straight dispassionate glance of her green eyes—a glance in which Lawrance felt himself comprehended to no known end. He literally shivered: he was frightened by the sense of his blindness and his insecurity. Doris meanwhile was engaged in a harangue concerning vegetables.

"And I must say," she concluded, "you're not very polite to Mr. Lawrance. Especially considering we haven't seen him for more'n a month. I think you're very rude!" The poor girl could not recover her self-control.

Lawrance felt embarrassed for her. Again his mind was diverted from Olga, he tried to think of something to say that might help.

What he did say was not tactful in the least: "Perhaps Olga didn't catch Lord Burpham's name. She only just met him that night we were at the 'Trafalgar.'"

"Oh!" Doris lifted her chin high. "She caught his name all right. Trust *her*!"

There was silence. Doris ostentatiously busied herself with some cabbage and potatoes, while Olga read. Lawrance, looking at the sitting girl, suffered strongly from the especial mobility of her figure, a mobility that was tender, yet keen. It was, as an actual fact, dreadful to him that she should be there, that she should be made in just that way, like a little girl and yet not like a little girl—he could not express it. She wore an old blue dress; her sleeves were rolled up. Probably she had been washing dishes. That dark fine hair of hers fell on her bare arm, suggesting fiercely forbidden images: her pale flesh seemed to signal exquisitely sensitive reserves: the dark down that bridged her eyebrows was so delicate, so scarcely seen, and yet so much her personal attribute, that even the faint sight of it seemed to initiate Lawrance to a throbbing intimacy, to initiate him and to withhold. It was an acute and esoteric torture to the young man. He remembered his dream, and flushed. Her indifference was the cruellest possible trouble to his blood. If only she had been demonstrative and affectionate, he would have had some leverage for the movement of his will not to yield. Now, he could do nothing but feel his weakness. He looked away from her, but her red lips and delicate straight nose and broad low pale forehead were in his mind's eye still. "What does she mean," he brought himself to think, "sitting there reading while her sister is doing kitchen work? She must be selfish. She'd make a bad wife."— There she sat, immune. Poor Doris! No wonder she found Olga trying. With a feeble flicker of irony, he reflected that he did too.

He sat down, and took up a cheap illustrated magazine. It was absurd to keep on standing up there by the

dresser, staring at the ground. He would not think of Olga: there, at least, was exercise for his will. He wished he could think of something to say to Doris. He was annoyed by his temperamental inability to say something about nothing. Doris was too much put out to chatter. Well, that wouldn't last long. . . . It was odd that Lord Burpham should be the unwitting cause of distress both to Muriel and to Doris, and for the same reason, because another person happened to know him, and they didn't. Lords brought about a great deal of disappointment and heart-burning and general commotion. He wished they didn't exist. No wonder some people wanted to abolish them. Yes, Muriel and Doris were agitated in just the same way, both so profoundly. Hurt vanity—hurt in an especially bitter and unforgivable way. . . . No, it was no good. He was in the same room with Olga, breathing the same air. He could not forget it— It was Muriel's fault! Her jealousy had let him in for this. But he had co-operated; he was paying the penalty for that. He had not known what he was doing!

He dropped the ridiculous magazine on the floor; he got up from his chair, determined at the moment to plead illness or to make some other excuse to get clear of the house. He was choked with continence. He should have been married to some honest, simple, vigorous girl,—some “jolly pug and well-mouthed wench,”—he should have been a country clergyman married so, freshly a father every two years: that should have been his defence against the flesh. Anglo-Saxon morality was in his blood that ran so steadily and stubbornly with desire. Anglo-Saxon honour, too, was involved in him,

and he felt it now, bristling under the memory of the promise he had given to his wife. He half turned to the door. Yes, he might save himself from the revenges of his honour and his morality by immediate retreat.

Olga rose with a swiftness anticipating that of the escape that Lawrance had intended to make. "I'll help you now, Doris," she said. "I did want to finish that chapter. Sorry." She looked at Lawrance with her sudden directed clearness—too rapidly for a gaze, too comprehendingly for a glance. "Why didn't you come before?" she asked him. "I wanted you to come. You never even wrote."

"And when he does come you don't hardly speak to him! I wouldn't come again after this if I was him!" Doris looked up from by the oven, with a flushed face and pouting lips. "The way you're wrapped up in yourself, Olga, I'd be ashamed! He was just going away, and I'm sure I don't wonder."

"You weren't, were you?"

"Well, I—I thought you had so many to get tea for, and your mother not being well—"

"We'll have tea ready in a few minutes." Olga took a tray, and began putting cups and saucers and things on it. Her movements were rapid and clear, much more efficient, better gauged, than those of Doris. She went to the oven, sifted out the ashes, put on a light sprinkling of coal. "I'll go and set the table." She took the tray. "You might have written again." She lowered her voice as she passed by the young man at the door. "How did you get bruised like that?" She had a curious look of reluctant tenderness that was new to Lawrance.

"Oh, an accident—nothing much."

"Well—" She stopped and gave her familiar little frown.

"Give me your tray," he said, and took it.

Outside the door she turned intimately to him, with a catch in her breath.

"We're not happy. Everything's been wrong these last weeks. I want to tell you. Let's talk later on—after tea. You'll see that things aren't right."

He nodded, said "I'm very sorry," being really relieved by this presentment of a buffer-state of feeling between them. "There's nothing *wrong* with your mother?" he asked.

"She's not ill, exactly. She's unhappy. . . . I can't tell you now. I do so wish you'd come before. I wish I was *ugly*!"

"What do you mean?" Lawrance was alarmed. The girl had spoken with a violence astonishing in her.

"Give me the tray. No, don't come in. Take me out somewhere after tea—anywhere."

Lawrance, through the opened door, saw Mr. Crocker-ton Deavitt and Marjorie playing dominoes. "That's the feller!" Deavitt, with his head down sideways on the table, sniffed interrogatively, then turned the domino up. "Double four! My word! Mother *will* be pleased!"

CHAPTER XVII

AS Lawrance sat down to tea, he knew that Olga was not mistaken: something was wrong. The air was burdened as with an unformulated sentence of punishment. Old Flynn had shuffled unwillingly in at the last moment. He had a bad cold, and could hardly speak. He looked threatened. All through the meal he wore a thick woolly cinnamon-coloured overcoat, tightly buttoned, and a faded grey comforter round his throat. After the first moment of seeing Lawrance he did not meet the young man's eye, which, indeed, was hardly ever there for him to meet. "You've been away," was all he said to him.

"Father's been all the afternoon at Captain Eagle's!" Marjorie informed them, and, in the silence that followed, "Captain Eagle's!" assailed Lawrance's ears with meaningless spectral repetition. He sat down between Doris and Olga, on Mr. Flynn's right. Opposite him was the boarder "Uncle Lance," an elderly bank-clerk whose full name was Mr. Lancelot Ewing. He was small and sapless, with an indriven blighted face that might have been mean if it had had enough life to be that: as it was, it seemed to represent the human aspect reduced to the last level of insignificance and stultification. It was only the disproportionate largeness of his ears that redeemed him to some sort of personality. He looked as though he had never had money and had

never made love. He gave out, from all over him, a thin exudation of poverty and inanimate toil. Marjorie, continuously devouring bread-and-butter, sat next to him, and on her other side was Mr. Crockerton Deavitt, not talkative now, evidently susceptible to the atmosphere. He cleared his throat in the intervals of applying himself to a hard-boiled egg. Mrs. Flynn and the other boarder, "Uncle Tofty," whose place was laid next to Olga's, had not appeared.

Lawrance felt dazed: his very expectancy of evil had dulled edges. They all seemed like dumb animals fortuitously herded together, with depressed heads, munching. Deavitt, it was true, was on the edge of the herd, he would get clear. He gave Lawrance now and again a glance that seemed to indicate an imminent remark, and Lawrance, fearing a return to the subject of Lipscot, addressed him with the question, Had he known Mr. Titmarsh for long? He hardly heard the brief and determinate reply. The old "Mariner" kept on caressing his cup of cocoa, warming his haggard hands. Doris occasionally sniffed, and Mr. Ewing ate audibly.

"Oh!" Marjorie cried suddenly. "There's Uncle Tofty!"

Mr. Claude Tofton, a large fair man, somewhat further on towards middle age than Crockerton Deavitt, stood by the door, regarding them with a facetiously aggressive air. He had one thumb stuck in the arm-hole of his dove-coloured waistcoat. His coat and trousers, of light tweed and loosely fitting, served to expand his person. With the appearance of a bookmaker or an auctioneer, he was actually connected, lucratively, with a large Furniture "Emporium" in the West end. He advanced with a gross familiar swing.

"Well, Lawrance!" He tapped the young man's shoulder. "If a chicken and a half costs four-and-eleven, what's my share, eh?— You don't tumble, eh?" He laughed glutinously. "I've got half the youngest chicken, anyway." He patted Olga's arm, and Lawrance moved in his chair, looking dangerously at him. "By Jinks, ain't we havin' a lively funeral, girls? Hand us over the butter, Doris, there's a good kid! Where's my ale, Marjorie? Gee-whiz!" Tofton had been in the United States once on business, and was proud of the American slang he had picked up. "What kind of a joint is this?" He turned up his little pug-naciously twinkling eyes. "Where's my tumbler?"

"Where's my fountain-pen?" Mr. Ewing surprised the company by the sudden dry tremulous snap of this question.

"Lord love us, Ewing," Tofton insolently answered. "You ought to keep that fountain-pen of yours chained up."

"I lent it to you yesterday, you know I did."

"Ho didjer? Well, I haven't eaten it."

"Said 'e only wanted it to endorse a cheque with." Ewing's eyes, fixed straight in front of him, were red with anger. "Then takes it *orf*. 'E writes thick. After 'e 'ad it last time I could 'ardly use it—crossed the nib. Man oughtn't to go using another man's fountain-pen. Oughter 'ave more—" He gulped.

"Interesting conversation." Tofton forced a yawn.

Marjorie had been trying to get up to fetch the ale and tumbler, but Deavitt was holding her with his hand firmly clasped under the table just above her knee.

"Oh, Mr. Deavitt!" She pouted and giggled.

"What's the matter?" Tofton looked sharply at her, with annoyed suspicion.

"Naughty child!" Deavitt exclaimed. "Why don't you tell the—nice—kind—gentleman where his tumbler is?"

"I've got to go and get it for him! Oo-er! Let me go, Mr. Deavitt! You're pinching!"

"But it's very rude of little girls to leave the table. Isn't it, Pa?" He addressed old Flynn, who sat eating bits of hard dry toast, taking not the smallest notice. Olga looked frightened, and Doris held herself consciously aloof.

"I shall have to get a new nib," Ewing put in.

"P'raps you'd like to fetch me the tumbler yourself, then?" Tofton was now furious. His heavy red jowl had a mottled flush. Ewing watched him with gratification.

"Fancy that, now!" Deavitt exclaimed in a forced ladylike tone. "I wonder!" He scratched his forehead, and looked earnestly to the ceiling. "I wonder what it is that makes me wonder!"

Olga rose quickly, took a tumbler from the sideboard, and put it by Tofton's plate.

"Thank you, my dear," he said. "Thank you:" with the implication that the girl was intimately on his side. "But I haven't any ale," he added.

"I shouldn't be surprised," said Deavitt in an absent voice. Marjorie began to struggle again to get up.

"I should think you'd get sick of playing the giddy goat, Mr. Deavitt." Tofton's voice was thick. "Why can't you chuck it, and let the child get up?"

"Margarine! Ahem!" Deavitt looked down at her reprovingly. "That's twice I've had to speak to you

already! How often am I to tell you to get up when you're called in the morning, lazy little hound? Please, teacher—" He held up his disengaged hand.—"Please teacher, this little girl pinched me. Oh, she *is* rude!"

"You hurry up and get that bottle of Bass, Marjorie!" Tofton brought his fist down on the table. "Am I to wait all the evening for it?"

"I shouldn't be surprised." Deavitt had not once looked at Tofton, nor addressed him directly.

"Nothing like *real* wit, is there?"

"I shouldn't be surprised." Deavitt's tone, polite and casual, did not vary.

"Oh, say it again, I would, say it again! What's the charge for the show, eh?" Tofton put his hand in his pocket and took out a sixpence, which he shoved across the table. "Talk about humour! Time for the Second House yet?"

"I shouldn't be surprised."

"Good Lord!" Tofton shouted, impaled between his rage and his idea of his dignity. "Good Lord! A man gets fed up with this kind of tommyrot. A pity some people don't know when they're making exhibitions of themselves." Deavitt laughed. "Dam silly swine!" Tofton bellowed.

"Mr. Tofton." The old man drew himself suddenly up, and looked steadily at him. "You're at my table."

"Well!" Tofton stared, taken aback. "Well, what of it? I *pay*, don't I?— What of it?"

"Nothing but that I'll thank you to behave accordingly."

Mr. Flynn was trembling. The little bank-clerk by his side looked up with features discomposed to a momentary eagerness that seemed too much for him.

His eyes fell to his plate again at once. Doris grew very red and smothered an exclamation. Deavitt guarded any emotion he might have, but released his grasp of Marjorie, who was too much excited to think of getting up now. Olga was very still; her fixed eyes dilated. Lawrance touched her hand, and she at once took his, firmly.

Tofton's jaw had dropped. "Well, I—" he stuttered. "I— Look here, now," he went on, "this is a bit thick, Mr. Flynn. I put it to you, I didn't start all this silly rot. Why do you go for me, then—eh?"

"Understand this, Mr. Tofton: that I don't allow my guests to be insulted at my table. I don't allow it." The old man made no gesture.

"Ho! You don't allow it, don't you! Well, and may I ask you how you're going to stop it?"

"By turning you out of my house if you insult Mr. Deavitt again."

"Turn me out! eh? You can't do it. You know you can't do it. Look here." He got up. Lawrance immediately got up too, and barred Tofton's approach to the old man. "What are *you* interfering for, hey?"

"I say, Mr. Flynn,"— Deavitt leaned over—"don't trouble about me. I won't rag any more."

"Hear that? Hear what he says?" Tofton stamped his foot. "And you expect me to keep mum and not say bo to a goose!"

"Get his ale, Marjorie," said Olga quickly, and the child, with full excited eyes, reluctantly left the table, as Mrs. Flynn came in.

Lawrance, meeting her aspect, was astounded by its change. The roguish light was gone from her eyes;

they were unhappy and nervous: she looked much older, she looked stiffened and hardened, she, still herself, was crossed by a frightening unfamiliarity. At Lawrance she tried to smile, and the effect of this abortive reassertion was to the young man no less than tragic. It was as if there were gathered up into the smile all sickness that would be health, all darkness that would be light, all loss that would be gain.

"Come along, Ma!" Deavitt called out, and Lawrance was extraordinarily grateful to him for that tone, at that time. "Another cup of tea for little Archibald! Mine's the one with the cow-catcher, please, teacher. Oh—*thank* you!" He pointed to the cup that had an inner ridge for moustache protection.

Marjorie, reappearing with the ale, tittered. "I copied that one you told me about the cow-catcher in my notebook!" she said eagerly. "I copied lots. 'Sunday was the day, and 'twas half-past nine, When she took the ticket on the District Line!' And: 'We've marmalade, Of every shade—' you know." She leaned over the table, and pushed Deavitt's cup to the tea-urn, neatly abstracting Tofton's sixpence as she did so.

"Naughty little hound," said Deavitt in an undertone. "Mustn't do that."

Tofton had not noticed. He still confronted Lawrance, and his back was turned to Mrs. Flynn. "Better ask *her* what she thinks about turning me out, hadn't you?" He jabbed his head down towards old Flynn, who kept his place, very erect, with his eyes fixed on his wife.

"Dearly beloved brethren," Deavitt intoned parsonically, "as we have now concluded the last verse of hymn

number two hundred and tooty-two, may I request you to return to your pews? The offertory to-day is for the Society for Providing Topboots and Pyjama-legs for the Aborigines of East Clapham." He took a sixpence from his pocket and threw it over so that it fell with a ring into Tofton's plate. "Oh, thank you, madam! Couldn't you make it sevenpence-halfpenny?"

Doris laughed, and then looked indignant. Mrs. Flynn sat down.

"There's your ale, Mr. Tofton," said Olga without looking round. Her lips had paled a little, and those long eyes, that kept fixed to a far point in front of her, were dry and bright. Doris was fidgetting, anxious to say something, but at a loss.

Tofton turned. "What d'yer think of it, Mrs. F.? Seems I don't behave so's to suit your friends, so I've gotter be chucked out! What d'yer think of that?"

"Oh, I say, Mr. Tofton!" Lawrance, seeing Mrs. Flynn's distress and her fear, interposed. "Don't you think we've had about enough?"

He could not say more. His impulse dragged, exhausted. Looking round at all their faces, he was smitten suddenly by the conviction of a need for purification, for himself, among them all, involved by them all. A Sacrament of Purification! If only there was one! There must be, with this so urgent and so sick demand. Lawrance was Christian at heart: he could believe, now, in Christianity as living truth, could believe in the utter indispensability of the Faith. What could deliver Olga from the body of this death? How could he? It might be that she would need purification from him, most of all. On what verge was she now, forebodingly?

Tofton, still standing, took his bottle of ale and poured it into his tumbler deliberately, preening his dignity.

"What I say," he went on, after a gulp, "what I say is this: I'll go—certainly—of course—"

"Just a drop more cowjuice, madam, if you please!" observed Mr. Deavitt.

"—but there are one or two little matters that have to be settled first, best known to you and me." Tofton gave Mrs. Flynn a heavy stare, then gulped at his ale again. "As a gentleman, I needn't say more." Again he put his thumb in the arm-hole of his waistcoat. "But there's one thing I'm going to have,"—turning to the old man—"and that's an apology. A full apology!" He drained his tumbler.

"I'd sooner swing than give it you!" Mr. Flynn shot a single flash that sprang from his eyes like blood from a stripe.

"Oh, you'll think it over! Don't you think so, Mrs. F.?"

"Well, now!" Deavitt exclaimed severely. "Where's that half an egg that Mother left last Sunday? Wasting good hen-fruit like that, Margarine, how dare you?"

Mrs. Flynn did not answer Tofton, nor look at him, but went on pouring tea into the "cow-catcher" cup, with a hand that trembled only slightly.

"Now then, Marjorie," Deavitt continued, "hurry up and get your nose-bag off; we ought to be starting."

"Good evening, ladies and gentlemen." Tofton looked round him with malevolent triumph. He gave a sarcastic bow. "I'm sure you'll excuse me, won't you?"

"Anyhow," said Mr. Ewing deliberately, looking at

no one, "anyhow it's not a decent action for a fellow to spoil another fellow's fountain-pen. An' cost eight-an'-thrippence."

Tofton took no notice. With his gross aggressive swing now consciously heightened, he went out.

"All *hover!*" cried Deavitt, "except the shouting!"

CHAPTER XVIII

DIRECTLY after tea Mr. Deavitt took Marjorie off to some show: all the movements of this gentleman were unexpectedly edged; he was gone in a flash, Marjorie, with her coat half on, hurrying at his heels. Mrs. Flynn left the room almost simultaneously; Doris was already gone. Olga, with her hand on the back of a chair, stood wavering for a moment, her bright mouth shook, she looked searchingly yet uncertainly at Lawrance, said: "Don't forget, will you?" and followed her mother.

The young man, labouring with a paralyzed consciousness, walked over to the fireplace and sat down in his usual chair, opposite the Mariner, who was filling his meerschaum pipe with concentrated attention.— "How egg-and-strawberry!"— "Most rikkidoodolous!"— "Here endeth the Second Lesson!"— "That's the feller!"— Deavitt's gags and patter hypnotically echoed: they streaked the silence. Lawrance kept thinking in fits and starts. Was all this better or worse than what he had expected—better or worse so far as it affected *him*? He had prepared himself for a temptation that had not come: the fire had been drawn, was he to go scot-free? Olga was in trouble; he must help her, he must divert his passion for her to sympathy and tenderness and goodwill: why, what better chance could he have had? It was exactly the diversion that he should have

been the first to demand, for his own salvation,—perhaps for hers, but here he was on altogether unseen ground. . . . The old man sat still, smoking his pipe, with one finger laid along the side of his long delicately shaped nose. He was still bound tightly up in his brown overcoat and his faded grey comforter. With the middle finger of his other hand he kept tapping rhythmically on the arm of his chair. Lawrance wished he would drink some whiskey, wished he would not sit there so much exposed to what he knew. . . . Olga in trouble! His thoughts swung slowly back, with a motion like that of a crane loading a ship: then the remembrance of the few looks she had had for him that evening came on with a swift assault of pain and fear. Ah, but it was the very chance he had most to dread! Circumstances were weaving a bond for them. Olga would be changed—was changed. This “help” of his would make just the appeal—and she, grateful and dependent, with all that superimposition of new emotions, would be more subtle, more dangerous, in her appeal to him. . . . He would not go on with such thoughts—thoughts that brought images. . . .

“I’ll take a drink, Mariner, I think,” he said, hoping that his host would reply: “I will, too.” But the old man only nodded.

“Look here—” Lawrance stopped: his tone had surprised him by seeming impertinent. Pouring his whiskey, he had his back now to Mr. Flynn.

“Well, what is it?” The Mariner spoke tersely, and showed that he was on his guard.

Lawrance turned, and receded mentally before those hard clear blue eyes, suddenly wakeful for him.

“That’s what I want to know.” He gave a foolish

half-laugh of embarrassment. "Look here, Mariner, we're old friends. What's up? Of course I know there's some trouble."

"Trouble? That fellow Tofton's a bounder and a cad, and he's got to go—somehow. That's all the trouble."

"Well, isn't that easily settled?" said Lawrance, knowing that it was not.

"It can't go on. It can't go on."

"Don't you want to tell me anything?" The old man did not answer. "Surely you're taking a drop with me?" Lawrance added.

"No. Not to-night.— That cur drinks, in his way. Drinks in his room, the swine! He's not fit to drink. He'd got some of his dirty liquor in him this evening. Couldn't you see?"

"Not very much, had he?"

"No, that's just it. Not much—not enough. That's his way." Mr. Flynn paused and emptied his pipe. "The bottom of the trouble is money," he went on slowly. "That's at the bottom."

"Good Lord, is that all? You don't mean to say you don't know you can count on me there?"

The Mariner shook his head. "It's too much money, Lorrie.— Too much."

"How much?"

"I don't know. He's been lending us money for years, on and off.— I don't know."

"Patsey knows, I suppose?"

"Why do you bring her in?" The old man's pugnacity of tone startled Lawrance.

"I don't know—I thought—"

"Well, I can tell you as well as she can. Don't go and

ask her—don't talk to her—I won't have it!—Five or six hundred pounds—at least. There ye've got it!"

"I might raise that: with a little time."

"Well, you're not going to raise it. I don't borrow money that I can't pay back.— Besides, you're married. You haven't the right— In fact, you'll oblige me by not raising the subject again. Gad! I'd steal the money, but I won't cadge on my friends. Young chap—married. You've no right, Lorrie, to propose something you wouldn't accept yourself. Do you see yourself sponging at my age on a young fellow like you?"

"Things aren't always as they sound." Lawrance was caught up by his own remark; he knew for a moment that it struck deeply at himself: it lodged in him for later extrication and survey.

"Are you fond of Olga?" The Mariner was not looking at him, but the question was sharply cut.

"Yes, I am." Lawrance strained his breath.

"Well, get her away, then. That's all I want. Get her away. She mustn't stay here any longer. It isn't fair. It's worth your while to get her away, if you're fond of her. I wouldn't ask you else. But this is a chance you won't be sorry for. It's the best way out. It's the only way out." He sat with hands clasped by his chin: his hard fingers made rapid movements.

"Do you mean to say that that blackguard—? God, I'll kill him!"

"Yes, I do. There's enough of that. I do mean to say it, and that's enough."

Lawrance was not prone to demonstrations, he hardly realized that he had got up and was holding his friend's two hands in his.

"I swear she shan't be in the house with him another night!"

"I could kiss you for that, my boy, I could kiss you—for all your black eye!" The old man laughed under his reaction.

Lawrance, elated, stood by the mantelpiece. He had acted from an immediate strong impulse, and that impulse for the moment made him secure. Here had emerged the matter of weight and force, it was a square boulder, firm-set, sprung up for him; on it he stood and held ground, looking far over the dwindled parapets of convention. There was a sudden abasement and flattening of those towering multitudinous heads that overlooked them.

"You mean it?" The Mariner looked up with a contraction of suspicion. "You'll take her away—at once?"

"Of course. Isn't that the only important thing?"

"Mother of God! If I were a younger man—" The Mariner clenched his fingers. "You saw that bullying swine? You saw him to-night? There's only one way with him—violence—a flogging—a smash in the snout—put that fear into his dirty soul—the fear of death—he needs it! The man sneaked us into his debt, Lorrie—paid bills for us—one thing and another—he was waiting—"

"I could give him a note of hand for it all, with full security—"

"He needn't take it, need he? And he wouldn't—what do you think? And why should you? You're doing enough, good God! Perhaps you might smash him up into the bargain. I see you've had practice lately." He chuckled, loosened his overcoat and his scarf, and be-

gan warming his hands. "Ah—and I'll have a drink—now. Can't drink unless I'm happy."

Lawrance poured him an abundant whiskey. He was longing to consult with him about the details of Olga's escape, but he couldn't say a word. He knew that whatever he might say would jar, would strike out of harmony with the fine completeness of the trust that the Mariner had in him. As Lawrance looked at his friend a wave of admiration and affection came up, loosening all his springs of feeling. The grey trousers, so habituated to the long shanks, the disordered loose collar and red necktie, the spotted waistcoat with its missing buttons, the heavy loose black boots, with their leather rubbed to grey at the ankles—all was intimately of the man, confirming love for him. Lawrance, in his turn, could have kissed him, kissed his tight-drawn reddened cheeks, his capriciously wrinkled mouth. He knew that no one else could have trusted him in that way, without the naming of "trust": no one else could have been so generous, so free, so direct, and so proud. There was the same pride in his neglect of moral convention as in his neglect of his clothes: the same pride that prompted, unknown. Lawrance thought of the whispered confabulation there might have been: "I trust you, my boy, I'm sure you'll play fair." If he'd said that, he wouldn't have trusted him, he wouldn't have been sure! No, they wouldn't plan details. That was Lawrance's own affair. But, as he sat on in the silence, his conscience stirred at the beck of his nerves. Had he, too, been generous? He hadn't thought of Doris—hadn't thought of what it would be like for the rest of the family after Olga had gone. With Olga's

departure the whole household had been blotted out for him. Doris ought to go, too, Olga ought to have some one with her—of course. . . . He was, out of simple nervous reaction, sharply afflicted by the idea that his plan was impracticable, that he had been rushed on to an absurdity on the spur of his emotions. What would Olga do—a young girl staying alone in some little hotel or boarding-house? What would people think? Mightn't she be exposed?—Lawrance pulled himself up in resentment at the meanness and the futility of these reflections. They were common and cowardly and constricted. Had he no wit, no will? And wasn't it the great thing, the only thing, to get her out at any cost, at once?

"We had better not wait," he declared suddenly.

"You're right. I'll go and fetch them."

"No. I will. I'll bring them here. Where's Doris?"

"At the 'Tivoli.' She's selling programmes there now. Didn't she tell you? She won't be back till late."

Lawrance barely reflected that it was very unlike Doris not to have talked a lot about the "Tivoli." He was immensely relieved that she was out of the house: his conscience, that had constrained him to ask where she was because he so very much didn't want to take her with Olga, was satisfied; but he had to say: "Won't it be pretty bad for all of you without her?"

"Not at all. Much better than before." The old man looked at him, surprised.

"That man's gone out, hasn't he?"

"Yes. That's all right."

"Oh, I think I could deal with him!"

Lawrance disliked himself for his bragging tone,

which came from sheer nervousness, against his will or feeling. The Mariner, putting a hand on his shoulder, showed that he understood.

"You go for them, my boy," he said. "And—perhaps—better not smash Tofton; better not. I didn't really mean what I said, you know." He was agitated. "Oh—and there's one thing. When Olga is yours—*when* she is—take her. It's best. Remember I told you."

Lawrance looked away and reddened. He had an astonishing sense of inferiority and of blindness. He groped, distracted. What he wanted to say was: "Ah, but I'm not the man you think me!" But the words, so sure of misconstruction by any one who did not know all that was in him, were patently vain. He left the room in haste.

CHAPTER XIX

THERE was no air of a conspiracy. "Well, Olga?" Lawrance said, after Mr. Flynn had finished telling them and she did not speak.

She went towards him; "Oh, Lorrie!" she said. She stopped short, both in her movement and her speech: she stood near him with drooped head. She looked amazingly small and young and white; she was like a straight young white tree, and though she was still, there came to Lawrance a sense of trembling branches.

He was triumphant that she had, naturally and at that moment, called him "Lorrie"; it could not be "Uncle Lorrie" any more, he knew that.

"You'll see," he said; "it will be all right. Don't be afraid of anything!"

"And there you're right!" The Mariner got up and began to shake off his overcoat. Mrs. Flynn helped him. "I'm warmed with you, Lorrie! He's right, isn't he? It's courage we need, and then we're safe! Aren't we right, Patsey, my darling!" He took his glass. "Freshen her up! Yours, too! Stirrup-cup, you know. Why, Patsey!"

Mrs. Flynn was in sudden tears. "Olga—come—" Her words were in a harsh choking gurgle. Lawrance, after looking at her for a moment, lowered his eyes. He had never seen her cry before, and he could not endure it. She did not cover her face, her misery was naked

there and hideous. It was the extreme of sorrow's ugliness; being pitiable it was also dreadful to him. Her contortions were those of the lowest burlesque mimicry, her face was like a mask fashioned by a vulgarian caricaturist. She made these zany mouths at grief and cruelty and pain, and because tragedy had no dignity nor beauty in her, because it was stripped of all symbolic alleviation, it was shot terrifyingly off from all that a young man, ignorant of it, had supposed it to be. Muriel's crying was quite different, it warped her pathetically, but it was not tragic. Lawrance had never before come to this detail in the expression of sorrow, never thought of it as existing. If he thought of a sorrowful woman his vision was of the tears of a Niobe.

"Why doesn't she turn her head?" he kept thinking, "why doesn't she—poor—" Olga was by her: he did not like it that Olga should be seeing her, seeing those distorted lines and pulled down edges, that look of the mouth—so horribly resembling laughter; those eyes, not like themselves, eyes that oozed, half-shut. But Olga did not mind as he did; he could see that. She was not driven off in his masculine way. She put her arms round her mother, and pressed her face to hers: the act seemed heroic to Lawrance; its heroism broke through his repulsion. Mrs. Flynn clutched her girl.

"It won't be long," she gasped. "You'll see—"

Olga drew from her, with her pale cheeks stained by those tears. She touched her own cheek with her fingers, she looked wonderingly.

"I can't cry." She spoke so low that the words hardly reached Lawrance. "There's so much else. That's why, I suppose."

Old Flynn came between her and his wife. "Dear

old girl," he said, "darling Patsey. I love you. We know how it is." He took her hands, one in each of his. She pursed her crooked mouth, and gulped again, but with a slower movement of her throat. "Go up and get your things, Olga."

"How is she going?" Mrs. Flynn strained her gaze to her daughter. "Don't wear your hair down: you mustn't—you can't. Do it like you did with Doris that time you dressed up—you remember." She spoke rapidly, hard driven. "And here—"—she tugged at her finger— "Oh, I can't get it off, my finger's swollen." The effort veered her self-control. Wrenching the ring she broke the flesh of her knuckle and the blood sprang. "Here it is!"

"You mean I'm to wear it?" Olga started.

"Ah, Olga darling, it's the ring that keeps your courage! Don't you see? When you're alone, the ring's a friend for you." The old man had released Mrs. Flynn's hands: he was pressing his blue-spotted cotton handkerchief to her hurt finger.

"Well—" The girl hesitated, then she went over to Lawrance. She gave him the ring, and held out her left hand to him. "You—"

He put the gold ring on her second finger, without holding her hand. He remembered his promise to Muriel. "What would this be?" he thought.

"They're all girls, Michael!" He heard the woman's voice cry out. "I've all of them girls. I wish I hadn't! It isn't right—it'll never *be* right! And I've tried such a long time—" She sat down and put her head between her hands. Lawrance, looking up from Olga, saw the black tight coil of hair, grey-streaked, with one strand loosened and a hair-pin that was coming out. "Give

pleasure—yes—they do—and they take pain. If it hadn't been for the money—" She raised her head. "You must go, Olga."

"Mother dear." Lawrance went and stood by her as Olga left. "Don't worry. You know I—"

He stopped and took her hand. He felt sure she did not really trust him, that the case was not isolated and individualized for her as it was for old Flynn, that she saw him in the main a young man, accidentally Oliver Lawrance, their friend—a young man going off with her girl who was so much a girl, and whom he knew she loved far more than she loved Doris or Marjorie. Yes, she was throwing her Olga perilously from a burning house, that was what she thought: that was obvious. He must make her understand. He wondered what the whole of Tofton's formidable power upon them was; surely it wasn't from money only, he couldn't believe it: especially now that he had seen Mrs. Flynn.— And there was his mother, sitting on in her drawing-room at Malstowe, all the time. . . .

"You needn't be unhappy, really—" He stopped again, afflicted, as he always was, by the inadequacy of his speech and his tone. The old man interrupted him.

"Come now, Lorrie, we must let the women cry if they want to! No harm in that! Your drink's waiting for you." He swallowed some of his own, with the familiar machine-like motion of the straight sparsely fleshed hairy bones of his neck.

"Well, all I mean is—you know me, you—I swear to you she's safe with me!"

"You're doing a great deal for us, Lorrie, don't think that we—"

Mrs. Flynn looked at him with, for a moment, her old

affectionate and roguish glance. Answering as though he had merely promised good care for Olga she seemed to miss the meaning of his declaration. She replied to his attempt to put her mind at rest by quieting him herself. None the less, Lawrance felt tremendously bound by his pledge, far more bound than by the other which he had given to Muriel on demand.

"There's no question of gratitude between us," he said rather priggishly, though indeed there was nothing priggish about him then. "Besides, I—"

"You drink your whiskey, Lorrie! There's some poetry I read once, wish I could remember it—good poetry, none of your Irish snuffle—some book in the ship's Library. Something about standing up and treading everything to dust." The Mariner put his knotty forefinger to the side of his nose. "'He stands up and he treads to dust'—that was how it started. 'Fear—and mistrust'—that was the rhyme. Then there was something about knowledge and patience and strength—fine lines; the right stuff. Wish I could remember it.—'Binds for sandals on his feet—' You know, it isn't always the things that seem right that turn out right. The Church is wise there. You have to take everything into account. Ah, the Jesuits know a thing or two! I never believed in general principles— You've got to know when to tread 'em to dust, along with the rest! We know what we're about, Patsey, don't we?"

She gave no affirmation.

"Yes!" he went on, flashing his old eyes. "And now we go gathering grapes from thorns, grapes from thorns! —Ah!"

He broke excitedly on his final falsetto. Lawrance looked at him, puzzled: more puzzled still by a certain

gleam of furtiveness that was shot through the old man's glance at him, furtiveness not free from fear. Mrs. Flynn, erect at the table, sat with hands folded, and without a look for either of the two men. She seemed to have cut off every current of communication.

There was a knock at the door. Lawrance went, and found Olga there, with her coat and hat on, and in her hand an old Gladstone bag. "I don't want to go in the room again," she said at once. "I'm ready."

Lawrance noticed instantly the effect of the changed arrangement of her hair. The curve of her neck was new, so was the curve of her cheek, and the set of her head: he was startled by the white unfamiliar flesh behind and below her ears; it was differently white. He was overcome by this strangeness, then Olga's eyes and her lips reassured him of her, and he was excited by the blend of the strangeness with the reassurance. It disconcerted him that he should feel her so keenly, that he should be drawn thus: he tried to reject his emotions, he was violently ashamed of harbouring them at such a time. But in his effort towards rejection, in his shame, he was struck heavily by her looking younger than ever with her hair "up"; she was dangerously and unnaturally and defencelessly young.

He looked back into the room. The old man stood tall and lank before the fireplace: the woman had turned her chair from the table so that her back, erect still, met Lawrance's view. Mr. Flynn, seeing his friend put on his overcoat, saluted him with raised hand.

CHAPTER XX

THE next morning Lawrance was called on the telephone a few minutes after his arrival at the Office. He heard the Mariner's voice, queerly sonorous and metallic: "I beg of you to come at once and bring Olga." Mr. Flynn seemed not to hear the young man's agitated question; he repeated: "I beg of you," while Lawrance was stammering it. "It is urgent," he added.

"Of course I'll come, but won't you tell me what's happened?"

"Tofton's dead. Found him this morning with his throat cut." Mr. Flynn rang off.

As Lawrance had his overcoat half on, Mr. Inge appeared, panting as usual from his walk up the two flights of stairs.

"Ah!" he said, "just arrived, eh?" and then, astonished, he saw that the young man was not taking his coat off, but putting it on. This was so unprecedented at such an hour that it completely took the rest of Mr. Inge's wind. He gasped, speechless.

"Where's my hat?" Lawrance exclaimed.

"Your *hat*?" Inge stared at him. "What's up?"

"I've got to go. Where's my hat?"

"How the devil should I know where you put your blooming hat? Why have you to go?"

"Britton!" Lawrance called the clerk. "Have you seen my hat?— Mr. Inge!" He had not seemed con-

scious before of that full presence. "You haven't got it, have you? I mean—"

"God bless the boy! D'you think it's up my sleeve?"

"Will you lend me yours?"

The large man stared again, then he burst out loudly laughing. It was too much, this earnest intentness of young Lawrance in demanding the loan of a hat that would be three or four sizes too big for him.

"Do you want to be gayed in the streets, man?" he gurgled.

"No, but I have to get out. I tell you I have to get out!"

"Righto. Don't lose your hair about it! What's the trouble?"

"Sorry." Lawrance recovered himself. "It's only—well, it's urgent. I have to go."

"All right. Be back again to-day?"

"I can't tell. I don't think so— Look here, Mr. Inge, will you lend me your hat?"

Inge shrugged his shoulders. "It's a sacrifice," he said. "But of course, if you insist—" Lawrance was standing with outstretched hand and a fixed expression. "Well, here you are. Wipe your nose before you put it on!"

In a few seconds Lawrance was in the street. He took a taxi, telling the driver to go to the nearest Hampstead Tube. Olga he had left the night before in a small hotel near Euston Station. In the cab he tormented himself by trying to decide if it would be quicker to drive the whole way to the hotel or to finish the journey by Tube. For nearly five minutes he kept wondering if the driver would answer him honestly if he asked him. All the while his absurdly large felt hat

was falling over his forehead or over his ears; he continually pushed it back, he took it and tried to squeeze it up: it never occurred to him to lay it on the seat. At last he decided that he couldn't stand the delay of buying a ticket and going up and down in lifts; he lowered the window and shouted to the man, who didn't hear him. Then he put his head further out of the window, and as he was shouting, more loudly than before, Mr. Inge's hat fell into the street. Lawrance, at this tragic hour, seemed destined to be pursued by the spirits of opéra-bouffe. But now the driver stopped and a newsboy came running up, grinning, with the mud-stained hat. The driver looked round, grinning too. "Lost yer 'at, sir?" he said. The man and the boy grinned at one another, united in sympathy with the eternal jest of a hat blown off and having to be run after in the street. The urchin, Lawrance noticed, was almost incredibly pretty, so pretty that it seemed he must have faded long ago, like roses: London street life you would have thought bound to tarnish him in half an hour. He was prettier for a boy even than Letty was for a girl. Lawrance did not think of Olga in comparison; he never connected Olga with prettiness. He resented the boy's adorable looks; they seemed misplaced, incongruous at that moment. He gave him some coppers and put on the muddy hat at once. "Leyton Hotel!" he called to the driver. "It's near Euston." "Lyetonotel!" The boy gave a grimace that his inordinate beauty perfectly withstood. "Cost 'im fourpence!" he yelled as he broke away.

The taxi went on, and Lawrance wondered at the blind lavishness of Nature, at her barren bestowals. Meanwhile the mud dripped down over his forehead, and

blended with the remains of his bruises. He took off his hat, at last, and wiped his face, inadequately.

He found Olga eating eggs and bacon in her bedroom, with a book propped up in front of her.

"You're all right?" he asked with hurried embarrassment. He stood with his back to the door, holding off from her.

Olga nodded. She tightened her lips, and the corners of them drew down. Her eyes laughed. "Where did you get that hat?" she asked, and laughed outright.

"Upon my word!" He felt, and looked, bewildered and foolish.

"It isn't yours, is it?"

She leaned back in her chair and laughed without control, her mouth open wide for gleams of her brittle small teeth. Lawrance watched her, not knowing what to say.

"No," he said at last, "—er—of course it isn't mine." He wondered why there should be such inherent comical properties in a hat. This intrusion made him vexed and impatient. "I've come to take you back," he declared. He was relieved to be able to bring her to a different sense of the occasion.

"Oh!" This stopped her laughter. "What? now? At once, Lorrie, do you mean?"

"Yes; it's all right now. That man—he isn't there any more."

"What, they've got rid of him!"

Lawrance turned his head. He was chilled by these sinister words from the unknowing girl. "I don't know," he said. "But it's all right. He isn't there."

"You don't seem to know very much—"

"Well, I only heard over the telephone. That—that was all I heard, practically all."

He couldn't tell her here, not for her sake, but for his own. It was their room, though she had been there all the night alone. Still, he had brought her; the room had been taken as for them both. Lawrance refused to associate it with such a monstrous revelation. He walked to the nearer of the two windows and looked out on the broad dull street, a street that was full of little hotels like this one, most of them led up to by a short and narrow flight of steps. The morning was grey, the rain was beginning again in a thin drizzle.

"Must we go at once?"

Lawrance heard the question dimly. Inertia had seized him. He could have stood like that by the window, watching the people and the cabs and the motor-busses, on and on.

"Well, must we?" the girl repeated. "Can't I finish this chapter first?"

"I suppose so."

He turned and looked at her closely. What a mania she had for reading! She was intent on her book. Harrison Ainsworth's "Old St. Paul's" he saw it was,—paper-covered, as usual. On a table by her side were three other Ainsworths: "The Tower of London," "Jack Sheppard," and "The Admirable Crichton." He remembered that he had promised to get them bound for her. She had wanted them bound in black, with gilt lettering. The Gladstone bag was open; he could see other books in it: de Maupassant's "Yvette" was on the top. So many books! That was why he had found the bag so heavy. Lawrance had read "Yvette"; he wondered how far Olga could understand it. She was not ignorant of facts, of course; yet her innocence was convincing at all points; she was far more innocent than

most of the girls who knew nothing. Poor Olga! What would happen to her? What would be done to her? Lawrance saw, too clearly, at that moment, that he would be much better for her than any one else she was at all likely to come to: he dismissed that clear vision. He bit his hot lip, and repeated to himself that his hands were irretrievably tied, grossly knotted at more points than one. . . . He had not noticed before that her bed was made, that her little plain white nightdress was lying folded by the pillow. No doubt she had done that herself. The basin was full of water in which she had washed. Her brush, on the dressing-table, had in it some dark fine wisps of her hair. Her long plaid coat was hanging on the wall. To-morrow there would be no trace of her. Probably some man and his wife would be in this room, perhaps a couple on their way back to Stafford or Crewe or Manchester,—or a man and his mistress. The agony of his not being able to take her grew on him, obliterating the fading images of the dead Tofton and the family awaiting their return in the Glasden Road. He felt that it would all happen over again, and again, always with the same void ending of loss. That walk from her house to the Camden Town Tube, that irrelevant physical strain at his heart that carrying her bag gave him, that short Tube journey to Euston, that walk to the street of the little hotels, his haphazard choice of the “Leyton,” her few scattered remarks and his,—all was in the far past, too, and in the far future. So was their admittance: the little lame percipient French waiter in the background, with his black moustache; the rather pretty red-haired girl who showed them to the room, going on ahead to light the gas—her confident and daring air—the quick pro-

fessional look-over that she gave them—her finality in leaving them alone together. She had brought towels for two.

Lawrance had left very soon,—a bad, docked, uneasy leavetaking. He had not kissed her. It seemed grotesque, undignified, to take so little when he was giving up so much. She did not want him to go, at least not then: he knew that. He was disappointing her unframed innocent expectations; he was making her leave off in the middle of the chapter. She was a little afraid, he thought,—not much. . . . He had left the hotel as silently as he could, hoping that no one would notice him. There was some shadow of satisfaction in feeling that the people of the house would suppose that he had stayed.

Olga put her book down.

“Did you sleep all right?” he inquired.

“Not very well. It was strange. The bed was so big. I wish you had stayed.”

“Oh, Olga!” His pain cried out.

“Oh, I wanted to get rid of *him* altogether!— I suppose you couldn’t, though. Of course I know you had to get back.” She regarded him gravely. “But you might have stayed longer, all the same.”

Her nostrils quivered a little: Lawrance remembered that at one time he had thought them excessively arched: he did not think so now. Every physical characteristic of hers harmoniously entered into her beloved allure; everything would have been the right assurance to him, had he been free. Her deep lashes fluttered, alive, above her smooth and tranquil cheek, above her round chin, very girlish, her caught-in underlip,—all her long and lovely face. Her virginity, in its last and strongest

phase,—yet still so unconsciously held!—seemed overflowing, deciduous through her eyes, her face, her figure. It flowed unknowing, and with purpose. She rose, went to Lawrance, took the lapels of his coat.

“Oh, you weren’t *nice* to me!” she said, with a sudden vivid revealing gaze, most hard for him to bear.

“I couldn’t help it! If you—if you knew more, you’d know that I couldn’t help it!”

“Your forehead’s all over mud! Such a sight! Come along!”

She took him to the washstand, dipped her sponge in the clean water that was left in the jug.

“Hold your head over!” She mopped his face. “That won’t do; you want soap as well.”

She soaped her fingers, and Lawrance felt them, long and mobile, on his forehead: “The soap,” he thought, “that she used this morning.”

“What’s the matter with you,” she laughed, “that you’re always getting into trouble lately? You never told me how you got so bruised, nor why you had to borrow somebody else’s hat. Such a hat!” She laughed again. “You might have borrowed one the right size!” She picked at his sleeve; the action seemed the most intimately affectionate that Lawrance had ever known.

“I came away from the Office in a hurry and couldn’t find mine.— Look here, we ought to hurry now. I’ll help you pack.”

“It won’t take a minute. Why ought we to be in a hurry? I don’t want to,—not now I know it’ll be all right to go home.”

“Well—your father seemed to think—”

“It’s wonderful of them to have got rid of him; I

never thought they would. But I knew I shouldn't stay here very long. I couldn't have, could I?"

"No, I should have arranged something else. I'd been thinking—of course you couldn't have stayed."

"I was wondering what they'd have thought. I suppose they'd have thought you were my husband, and had night work, or were a commercial traveller or something. But I don't look married, do I? Of course you *are*. I should know you were married, I think. It *does* make a difference."

"Suppose we were married?"

"Oh, I think I should like it. I don't really know, but I think I should,—if you were nice to me."

"Oh, Lord! I would be!"

"You're so funny. I was angry with you yesterday. I've never been angry with you before. You were quite different. I thought it would be like it was in the cab that time, only much better than that, because I like you more now. I don't see why you didn't kiss me."

"Olga, you don't understand! Don't you see I'd promised. I'd promised your mother—"

"What, not to kiss me? You always have."

"I know, but—oh, you don't understand!"

"Did you want to, then?"

"Of course I wanted to."

"Do it now, then! I can't stand you being so solemn over nothing. Do it now!" She took the towel away from him, held his hands, looked him full in the eyes, laughing.

"We must go.— We ought to have gone before."

"There's time enough for you to give me a kiss."

"There's not time enough for anything!"

Lawrance felt acutely that he was in an absurd posi-

tion, thrust into this rôle of Joseph. Divided between humiliation and desire, he clung to his native stubbornness. He did not want to kiss her that morning, when he had not kissed her last night. He was passionate for the evasion of this compromise between all and nothing.

"What are you afraid of?" She still held his hands.

"It's you who ought to be afraid."

"Why?— Yes, I know." She looked troubled.

"I'm not afraid of you. I couldn't be, ever! Don't you know that? I wish—"

"You wonder why I didn't kiss you last night." Lawrance had hardly heard her last words. "Well, you wouldn't wonder if you understood. If I'd kissed you I couldn't have stopped there. I couldn't have trusted myself—"

"I don't want you to trust yourself. But why couldn't you? And what has that to do with it? It's silly. Oh, I don't see *why!*"

"Surely you didn't want—"

"I want you to kiss me."

"But, Olga,—I've told you—"

"It would have been nice, wouldn't it, if I could have thought: 'He's fond of me, and he'll come tomorrow.'— And this morning isn't last night, anyhow. You wouldn't do anything so very dreadful now, would you?"

He broke away. He couldn't stand up to her any longer. "What I'm going to do is to pack your bag," he said, trembling.

She turned at once, and began to squeeze out her sponge. "I took a lot of books, didn't I? I thought I should have to read all the time you were at the Office.

I'm tired of love-stories. If I loved any one, I wouldn't love in the least like that. I don't believe any one would. Would you?— Oh, why did you put down in that book last night 'Mr. and Mrs. Deavitt'? He wouldn't like that much. He's never going to marry: he doesn't care for any girls older than twelve!"

"Yes, I oughtn't to have done that. It was the first name that came into my head—just having met him, you see. It wasn't the right thing to do at all—I didn't think—"

"Oh, it was a *joke!*" She threw the sponge into the bag, impatiently. "You *are* so serious about everything! It's all the more of a joke because there couldn't be a Mrs. Deavitt." She drew back from the mirror and began arranging her hair. "I hate these pins. I'll be glad to have it down again. You don't like it up, do you?"

"Olga." He looked at her in the glass. "You're angry with me because you don't know. I wish I could explain; I wish I knew what you felt—exactly—about everything."

"I don't know *what* I feel!" She frowned, more heavily than he had ever seen her. "Don't tease me!" Her eyes flashed and were vexed. "What's the use of wondering what you feel and why you feel it? That isn't important; the important thing is to go—straight—on!" Her emphasis was determined, fierce in vigour. "I'm not going to waste time any more, wondering. It's stupid. I'm not going to any more. I'll tell you why you weren't nice to me, though, taking me away out of charity, I suppose you did, making me feel it, making me feel lonely, so that I couldn't think: 'Well, he's fond of me, anyhow, and he'll come tomorrow.'"

"Olga, you don't really think I took you away out of charity, and that I'm not fond of you—"

"Well." She turned. "—You took me away because you were friends with Father and Mother, not for any nice reason—"

"'Nice reason'!"

"Well, a nice reason would have been that you liked me and wanted to kiss me and hug me and love me—there! That's a reason that has something to do with me. I'm left out of it all—I *don't* like it! I don't like *you*! You hurt me very much and you're horrid!"

Lawrance had not seen her cry since she was ten or eleven. Now, as then, she cried in a suppressed way, with little quiverings of the lip, and tears that started but did not fall. She brushed her hand over her eyes, and sat down on the bed, her head turned from him. There was a slight movement of her shoulders, and the sound of a withdrawn sob.

The young man looked, hesitated, then went and put his arm round her. "I love you, anyhow," he said.

"You don't, then!"

"Yes, I do. I always shall. Will you remember that, whatever happens?"

"Oh, I don't know what's the good of remembering *that*! Don't you see,"—she spoke in rapid breaths—"yesterday—we were here together—in my room—it was what he wanted—well, if— Don't you see? You'd have driven him away; I should have been safe; I shouldn't ever have been afraid again, in that way, not of him or anybody else. I don't want *that* being afraid; I want to get rid— Well, he's gone; it doesn't matter so much now. If I'd had to go back, like it was before, I should *never* have forgiven you!" She looked at him

with bright wet eyes; her cheeks were faintly, and as if artificially, flushed. Lawrance was utterly baffled by her innocence: but though he could not read it, he accepted it without dispute. "It was cruel of you," she went on, slowly now and timidly, "my asking you to kiss me, and I didn't ask you in fun, you know I didn't; you knew I meant it! It wasn't fair! I'll never, never, ask you anything again!"

"It's I who want to ask you. I've got to think. I want time." He spoke and felt quite calmly, now that he knew she loved him. "It isn't simple. Will you wait a little—just a little? You see, it makes it all different. I—I didn't know you cared for me, Olga; I didn't know!" He felt terribly disposed to cry himself, in spite of his calmed spirit. Tears, indeed, would have been the natural expression of his reaction. "Will you wait, darling, and will you say that you know I love you?"

"Wait?" She laughed nervously, twisting her fingers in the tassels of the counterpane. "Of course; I'll have to. I never read of any lover like you; you're a funny lover! Lovers make love, don't they?— No, that wasn't asking anything! I—"

She had his kiss at last. He held her close, turning her to him. At first he did not know that she kissed him,—loved him with the kiss,—but suddenly he became aware of her, keen-limbed and with more than answering lips: he felt that she was tremendously his, in a way utterly new to him, a way that he thought must be new forever. His gain seemed vast, it swallowed up the trouble of his desire for her. It brought an equality that pacified and assuaged. Her response to him held him back, made him safe, counselled waiting.

She left his embrace, and sat back at the head of the bed, drawing her narrow blue skirt down over her knees, which she clasped. Her long look for him was protective and tender, her eyes were glad and grave. Then she smiled, giving her emotions, it seemed, a long dismissal, returning, it might be, to a world that was whimsical, whatever else. Wisely and Orientally, with her eyes now narrowed, she seemed to accept and submit.

"Well—what now?" she said. "I thought you couldn't trust yourself? What did that mean?" He did not answer. "I'm glad we did have something, anyhow."

"Something! It was everything!"

"No, it wasn't!" She laughed lightly.

Again he longed to spell out her innocence. Certainly she was not innocent as are many modern girls, whose sensuality is elbowed out of reach by a host of trivial things,—love of admiration, love of having a good time or their own way, self-importance. . . . Lawrance felt ignorant and blind, but he felt now that his ignorance and blindness could be waived: the importance of knowing and seeing was palpably diminished. He sat silent, searching her face, from the low broad forehead to the chin, soft and firm and the whiter for the flush of her cheeks: all her vibrant young curves, of face and neck and figure, were in communion with him: he was content, as never before, to look at her thus, and he knew that in looking he was "making love" and breaking his promise to Muriel far more surely than by any blind embrace. He did not regret: he was even glad to have bought these moments at a price: but though he could dishonour his promise, he could not close his account with it. Curious, that if he had had that "everything," he

would not so much have broken faith with Muriel: so he felt, though he told himself the feeling was absurd, wrong— Had he kept faith with Olga's mother? He thought he had.

“Why, it's after eleven!” It was Olga, now, who had to speak of their going.

CHAPTER XXI

LAWRANCE'S mind returned, with an ugly jerk, to Tofton's cut throat, as they walked up the Glasden Road.

"I ought to have told you before," he said abruptly, "about that man. None of you will be troubled by him again,—ever."

Olga, looking at the house, now in view, saw that the blinds were drawn. "What!" she exclaimed softly; "is he dead?"

"He must have killed himself. They found him this morning."

Olga said nothing, but she quickened her pace, and Lawrance, carrying the heavy bag, grew breathless.

When they were at the door, the girl hurriedly whispered: "They've been waiting!— I'm glad you didn't tell me before, all the same."

They went in. In the dining-room, which had no fire, the bank-clerk Ewing was sitting with Mrs. Flynn. They sat on high-backed chairs, close to the big table with its dirty old green cloth. Olga, with that special unseen swiftness of movement which she could have, was by her mother, kissing her cheek and her forehead. Mrs. Flynn's eyes were red, and beneath the left one Lawrance noticed a swelling: he wondered if it could have come by crying. She looked very ill and old.

"Uncle Lance! It *was* kind of you to stay! Missing your work—"

"Aow no." Ewing spoke with a variable flavour of

cockney impossible to reproduce. "They can get on without me at the Bank once in a great while. There was a lot to be done, you see, a lot to be done. The p'lice an' all that."

"What, are the police here?" Lawrance asked, alarmed.

"Aow, yes. They had to come, you know, with anything sudden like that. They're upstairs. The doctor had to make a report, you see." He spoke confidentially, shrewdly, almost cunningly. "They're up in Mr. Tofton's room now." The egregiousness of this "Mr. Tofton's room" took Lawrance's breath. "They 'ad to, you know." Ewing dropped his aitches irregularly. "Pore feller!" He spoke out loud, as though he meant his voice to carry. "They're looking through his clothes and his papers an' all that. Evidence of unsound mind, you see my point, doncha? Mr. Flynn is talking to the Inspector."

Lawrance's heart sank. What had the Mariner said, he wondered, about Olga's absence? What reason had he given? He saw at once how black it would look against them, if it were known that Olga had been taken from the house for fear of Tofton. Of course there was only one explanation that was safe to give: that he, Lawrance, had taken Olga out, to the theatre, ostensibly, and then prevailed on her to go with him to an hotel. There must be no admission of the parents' complicity. Even apart from motive, that would blacken them with the jury. The Coroner and the jury would think them capable of anything. He must tell this story now, if he were questioned, and at the inquest. The inquest! It would be in the papers. It would be abduction. He had not thought before—

"What are we to say?" he whispered to Mrs. Flynn. Then he remembered that Ewing was there. He broke off, turned pale.

Ewing, with a quickness of perception that Lawrance would never have credited to him, rose from his chair. "I'll take a—er—turn in the air, if you'll excuse me," he said, with a little jerk of his meagre body.

"Mr. Ewing's a friend." Mrs. Flynn spoke for the first time. "You don't need to go," she addressed him; but he was already half-way to the door.

"It's better," he murmured.

Mrs. Flynn watched the door close, then, rapidly, she said: "Michael's told them we knew about Olga."

"Why on earth did he do that?" Lawrance was horrified by the disgrace.

"It's done now. We talked it over. We thought a great deal about it."

"How could he explain—?"

"There wasn't any need to explain, Lorrie."

"What! They take it for granted—!"

"Don't talk so loud."

"What must they think of her—and of you, too?"

"You know what they think."

"You could easily have said something else. Why, a hundred things—"

"Nothing else would have done. We couldn't have given the real reason."

"You could have said I'd run off with her, and you knew nothing about it!"

"Then you'd have been arrested."

"You might have risked that. Anything would have been better. You could have said she was eighteen, anyhow."

"Michael did say that. They may find out she isn't,

but it won't matter much. They'll only think we were shielding you and ourselves, and that's natural enough, if we knew. If we weren't supposed to know, it wouldn't be. I don't think they'll go outside the case,—his case—Olga, you've heard everything, haven't you? Don't forget. And you'd better keep your hair up.—Michael oughtn't to have telephoned; he didn't think. They hadn't come then." She spoke in a low, calm, even tone.

Olga's expression, as she stood close by them, was intent and remote. She looked as though she were reading.

"It's all horrible!" Lawrance spoke in pain.

"I know it is."

"Couldn't you have said she'd gone to friends?"

"It would have looked as though we'd sent her away on purpose." Mrs. Flynn had not once raised her eyes.

"Doesn't the other look like that?"

"Oh, no. They'll think that might happen any time,—often. Besides, they'd never think we'd make that up. It puts them on to another track."

"I'd rather have run any risk!"

"Then, if we'd said friends, they might have inquired,—they would have found out. Michael said: 'Any lie will make their scent keener.' We thought a great deal. There's one thing we mustn't say." She was almost inaudible. "Do remember that, Lorrie, remember that, Olga,—and that's why you took her. That they can't find out."

"Well, it's done.— I'd better stay?"

"No; why should you?"

"I will. I can't leave you all. Where's Doris and Marjorie?"

“Marjorie’s at school. Doris is somewhere in the house. I’d rather you went— There’s Michael coming downstairs with one of those men. Wait a minute.” She looked up at him at last with wavering frightened eyes. “I didn’t do it, Lorrie!” she whispered.

He started. The question of the authorship of Tofton’s death had not presented itself to him as important in itself. He had been absorbed by the danger in which his friends were from attachable suspicion. He was shocked back from actual unreasoned experience to the conscious normal moral standpoint. “What if she had?” he thought. The outflow of this reflection was checked by the entrance of Mr. Flynn with a tall sandy spectacled man in the uniform of a Police Inspector.

The man looked surprised at seeing Lawrance and Olga. “Watkins!” He turned and called. “Haven’t you been in the hall?”

“He’s talking to Mr. Ewing, sir!” A husky voice came from upstairs.

“Tell him he talks too much. Tell him to go to the hall, and stay there. Is this your other daughter, Mr. Flynn?” The old man nodded. “And this gentleman?”

“He brought her back this morning.”

“Oh. I see. Did Mr. Tofton make any use of this room?”

“He had meals here. He used that desk,” Mr. Flynn answered.

“The desk hasn’t been touched this morning, I suppose? No? Well, we shall have to look through it. Miles! Just come down here, will you?— I should like your name and address, sir.” The Inspector turned to Lawrance, who informed him.

Lawrance wondered why "out" cricket-matches of his private school days—the matches played on the other schools' fields—were so forcibly recalled: then he realized that the Inspector had exactly the manner of school-masters towards pupils of a school in which they did not teach,—a manner bland, distant, superior, precisely cognizant of the "locus standi."

Miles appeared, and the Inspector drew his attention to the desk. "Do you mind coming with me for a minute or two, Mr. Lawrance?" he went on. "I should like to ask you a few questions."

He led the way to the room opposite. It was stuffy and cold there: the room was hardly ever used, and barely furnished. It should have been a drawing-room, for the house was meant for people who were better off than the Flynns.

The conversation seemed scarcely worth the pains of the Inspector's notebook. He himself behaved as though this were so. Lawrance wondered if his perfunctoriness was a sign of his being a clever man.

The first questions concerned Tofton's conduct of the evening before. Remembering what Mrs. Flynn had said, the young man avoided the mistake of seeming to try to divert suspicion. He was frank about the scene at the tea-table, but he added, truthfully, that he had never noticed any signs of bad blood before.

"Do you know anything of his relations with the two girls?"

Lawrance replied, rather uneasily, that Tofton was "familiar."

"Yes." The Inspector half smiled. He did not record the answer in his little book. "The question may or may not be necessary, sir, but your own relations with

this girl—" He jerked his thumb towards the door. "Had the affair been going on for long?"

"For some time. In one way and another."

"I understand." The Inspector hesitated, seemed as though he were about to question further, then shut his book and put it in his pocket. "I may tell you that I don't think we shall have to trouble about that. We know beforehand, you see, pretty well what questions will have to be asked at the Inquest. There won't be anything of an irrelevant nature, you need not feel—I needn't detain you, Mr.—er—Lawrance, except that I should like to know if this Mr. Tofton ever struck you as a man at all likely to—er—do away with himself?"

"I never thought of it. But surely one never does, does one—with anybody one meets?"

Lawrance was conscious of pulling himself up rather abruptly. That was a false step, he thought, though a slight one. He shouldn't have appeared even casually interested in arguing that Tofton had taken his own life. The Inspector was narrowly regarding Lawrance's boots.

"There's nothing that would point to suicide!" He looked up suddenly at the young man as he spoke. "Nothing whatever!"

"Is there anything that would point against it?"

The other did not answer. He opened the door and waited for Lawrance to pass first. Lawrance, reflecting that it was curious that a Police Inspector should have eyes so exactly the colour of a cornflower, opened the dining-room door and walked in with quickened pace. He shook hands with Mr. Flynn.

"You'll telephone me at any time, won't you?"

"God bless you," the old man replied.

He did not seem downcast or alarmed. His air was

almost jaunty; you might have said he was in high feather. He stood, as usual, by the fireplace, he leaned his head back, he seemed a little theatrically conscious that he was showing spirit. Doris, on the other hand,—she and Ewing had joined the others, and Mrs. Flynn had left them,—looked more miserable than Lawrance would have believed it possible that she could look. She seemed swollen with misery, she was a puffy blanched wretchedness. The purpose of her blue eyes and fluffy hair and little turned-up nose seemed to have been malignantly suspended. Her bloneness, something in the same way as with Muriel, served to exhibit cruelly her unhappy emotions, to forbid her any kind disguise, any garment of mercy. Despair was a discord for her physical aspect,—and it was despair that Lawrance saw in her dulled gaze, and the bitter pulled corners of her unmade mouth. Muriel had felt less than this, had not lost so much: she had hoped to retrieve.

Olga was still remote. Lawrance wondered if the Inspector were now going to talk to her, alone. He could not understand how anybody could look at Olga and not know that she was virgin. But Police Inspectors might not have this kind of observation, or if they had, they would not be allowed to use it officially. What a pellucid look she had, as though she waited and knew! She was different,—she had been different since yesterday. He couldn't tell how, but she seemed less eager, less curious, more inclined to accept than to ask. She was right; she had given up wondering. She had come to the time; she knew that "wondering" was banished for the event. She stood in the arms of that; she was not now a questioning spectator. Lawrance suffered rapid strokes of comprehension; no phrases were in his mind. He for-

got Tofton; forgot the uniformed man who was turning out papers from the desk in the corner; forgot the shame that had been put on Olga; indeed that he could hardly have remembered, seeing her in no way touched by it. He had never seen her long clear face so beautiful: as he touched her hand he sighed deeply. She gave him again that protective look, more than maternal.

"Well, so long, Doris,—why, what's up?" Lawrance dropped his voice, puzzled by the girl's averted face and withheld hand. "Aren't you speaking to me?" he half laughed.

"Speak to you? I shouldn't think I would!"

"I'll see you to the door, Mr. Lawrance!" cried Ewing, with a lively little assumption of cheerfulness and tact.

His smile set in motion the creases of the sallow skin by his eyes and mouth. Lawrance, shifting his bewildered gaze from Doris's stiffened back, was reminded of the creases that come in one's fingers after a hot bath. Ewing put his hand on the young man's arm, but almost at once withdrew it, looking childishly shy.

He went outside the front door with him. "Well?" he said, with a mock-nonchalance that was extremely disquieting.

"Oh,—the Inspector? Nothing much. Only he's got some idea that it isn't suicide."

"Eow, has he?"

"Yes; he said there was nothing that pointed to suicide."

Ewing considered for a moment. Then his face brightened. "Yew wite till they 'ave a thorough medical examination,—all over," he said, with his mouth to Lawrance's ear. "Then there *mye* be."

“What do you mean?”

“I’ll see to that. I know. Mustn’t stay talking here.” His cockney accent returned to its usual modification. “Looks bad, y’ know; looks bad.”

He went off with an air of perky triumph. Lawrance stared back at him. He seemed significant, Ewing seemed significant and important. This was really more unlooked for than anything else. But, he quite seriously reflected, the man’s breath was worse than ever.

CHAPTER XXII

IT seemed too late to go back to the Office. The day was a Saturday, when Lawrance usually lunched at home, at about half-past one. It was getting on for one o'clock now. Muriel would be expecting him just about the time he would arrive.

But it would be intolerable to go back to Chiswick, to his house; to sit opposite Muriel for the whole of a meal; to be conscious of her; to wonder if she guessed; to have to say something now and again; to have to ask her how she felt; to be made to feel a brute, as his state of mind would certainly make him. Her presence was a perpetual reproach to him, anyhow, since he was convinced of his moral obligation to be fonder of her and more interested in her because she was going to have a child; whereas he was palpably less fond, less interested. To-day, with the idea of returning to her, he was struck by his antagonism to her as by a blow, and he knew why the blow came fresh. Her pregnancy had nothing to do with it: he had never had to increase the sum of his moral blame by charging himself with animosity against his wife because of that. Animosity on any grounds he had indeed scarcely felt since that morning when she had extorted the promise: indifference he had felt,—little else: he did not reflect that strong and constant animosity might have been more hopeful, a proof that the links between them were not broken alto-

gether. Why he, for the first time really deeply, did hate Muriel now, was because she had through that enforced promise blotted his honour, and, more importantly,—though this he did not admit,—because Olga wished now, he knew, to be his. Lawrance retreated from this latter intimation to an emphasis of his aversion to the return home. He could not go then: why should he have to go—after all that had happened? Surely he had rights, as an individual? He had been through a great deal. Lawrance came actually to self-pity. He could not go home. He would go to the Office and make up for his lost morning's work. The clerk Britton would still be there. He would telephone to Muriel.

Over the wire he gave the natural excuse,—pressure of work. The excuse had some ground, but Lawrance was humiliatingly visited by recollections of jokes on picture-postcards as he gave it. "Where are you telephoning from?" Muriel asked him casually. "From the Office, of course," he replied, annoyed. There she was, dragging him into a lie. But what else could he have said? He couldn't have said: "From Camden Town, near the Tube Station." That would have been unnecessary and absurd. She would have questioned further, she would have been agitated,—bad for her. Again Lawrance saw himself the hero of a comic postcard. In the Tube he wondered if for any reason she would call him up at the Office before he had had time to get there. He would of course be exposed, if she did. Britton would be entertained. Dishonour attended his relations with Muriel.

Opening the Office door, he heard the voice of Crocker-ton Deavitt: "Queer business, isn't it?" Lord Bur-

pham's cousin was sitting on the edge of a table, with an evening paper in his hand, talking to Britton who seemed flattered by the attention.

"Hulloa, guv'nor!" Deavitt sprang alertly to his feet, and came over with the paper. "I was looking for you. Seen this?" He indicated a headline: "Glasden Road Horror." "Nice mess-up, isn't it?"

Lawrance read the account. Some of the details were new to him: that the lock of the room had been forced "after the deceased had not put in an appearance at breakfast and did not answer when he was repeatedly called": that the "several gashes in the throat had been made by the deceased's razor, which was found lying on the floor by him": that the lower sash of one of the windows of the room was found thrown up: that "there were no signs of a struggle." The name of the doctor who had been called in was mentioned, and a few lines followed detailing the "long-established connection of the victim of the tragedy with the well-known firm of Messrs. Harper & Shaw, Furnishers and Decorators." Finally: "Investigations by the police are understood to be well under way already."

"Well?" Mr. Deavitt queried impatiently. "Well? My word, you do take a time to mop it up. Had lunch yet?"

He put on his hat, and Lawrance noticed the shining spruceness of his attire,—silk hat, morning coat, elegant light grey trousers, smooth kid gloves, and patent leather boots. Mr. Deavitt's grey-blue excessive eyes and heavily drooping yellow moustache were almost violently emphasized by his attire. The effect went beyond incongruity: it was intransigent in a rather enticing way.

The man's head looked smaller than before, under his silk hat: it struck Lawrance as queer that the face could contain so large a moustache and such large eyes. It seemed putting an undue strain. . . .

"If you haven't had lunch," Deavitt went on, "you might as well come and have it with me. There's a new place off the Lane where the grub isn't half bad.—Right you are.—My word, Pa and Ma won't half be in the limejuice, otherwise limelight, will they?" He tripped out in front of Lawrance with the suggestion of a lively bird.

"I'm coming back to work later." Lawrance turned to the clerk. "Been any telephone call for me?"

"No, sir."

"If there is, say I'm out to lunch and am coming back."

"All right. Oh, here's your hat. Found it just after you left."

Lawrance took it, relieved that Mr. Inge's was not to accompany that shining height of silk. "But what did Mr. Inge go home in?" his conscience prompted him to inquire.

"'Pon my honour, sir, I never noticed!" Britton laughed. Lawrance looked at him, puzzled. Why were hats such a joke?

"I say, don't make a half-hour job of it, guv'nor!" Deavitt called from the stairs below.

Lawrance smiled. He thought of answering: "'Arf a mo'," but could not do himself that violence. Not that he would have minded if he could have brought off the exclamation successfully; he would have been rather proud, but he simply couldn't get it out. He

could not accommodate himself so far, but compulsion was agreeably absent, so he replied: "All right, I'm coming!" instead.

Deavitt had relieved him. He was glad they were going to lunch together. He found the manner, the facilities, the slang, the unencumbered schoolboy push, the bright assured irreverence, the taut activeness, the light genial speedy surface sweep, of his new acquaintance, diverting in the literal sense: they drew him off from himself and so refreshed him. All this that would have been excessively irritating to many exactly suited Lawrance, gave him ease and security, lulled his nerves, excused and even justified his own silence and slowness. It refreshed him, too, that Deavitt was not involved by women: the young man enjoyed the presentment of a vista in which no women could, he knew, appear. This was altogether new to him. No doubt it was this indifference that piqued and even angered Doris. Poor Doris! Why had she been so sad and fierce that morning?

As he walked by Mr. Deavitt's side, he wondered how this exclusive lover of children entertained them. Did he, like Lewis Carroll, tell them stories? He couldn't imagine Mr. Deavitt doing anything that demanded such repose or such protraction as telling a story.— How very much life would be simplified if one were interested only in little girls! Lawrance thought of Olga in her little girlhood: how simple, how free and unknotted, his relations had been with her then! He envied extremely those people who could be satisfied with romantic attachments to children: they must have, he thought, singularly delicate and perceptive spirits.

"That's the second time I've asked you!" he heard Deavitt saying.

"Oh, I beg your pardon."

"Don't do it again, nortiboy.— How long have you been going to the Glasden Road tank?"

Lawrance replied that he'd known the Flynns since his early Oxford days,—for nine or ten years; "since soon after Marjorie was born," he said.

"Ah, she's a jolly kid, isn't she?" Deavitt's remarkable eyes changed expression: a light and momentary emotional gleam passed over them. "Nice affectionate kiddie. I'm very gone on her. You don't care about kids, I suppose? The other two more in your line, eh? They're quite outside my cab-radius, of course. I only like what I can carry. Olga must have been very nice, though, at ten or eleven. Wish I'd known her then. Frightful jar, how soon they grow up. No old hags of sixteen for me! This bus!"

He was on it in a twinkling. Lawrance darted after him, and scrambled up the steps.

Deavitt took out his watch. "One thirty-seven," he said. "I shall just do it. Got to see a man at the Law Society's Hall at one forty-five. I've never been late for an appointment in my life."

How very much annoyed Mr. Deavitt must be, Lawrance thought, when the lace broke as he was doing up his boots. "How on earth do you manage never to be late?"

"Oh, I don't know. Simply habit, I suppose. He won't keep me more than five minutes. Then we'll go and have lunch. We must talk over this Tofton business a bit. Do you play dominoes?"

"I thought you were going down to Lipscot by the eleven something?"

"So I was, but not now. Oh dear no, not now. Burphie's very peevish with me. He doesn't love his little cousin Archibald any mo-er! All because I rotted him this morning about some ostrich he used to keep when he was out in Africa. Bit of a bore, is Burphie; when he got started on that ostrich he couldn't get off. Counted all the eggs it laid and measured 'em and took the number of their spots. Fact. He might have been married to the blooming bird! I forget how I got his shirt out. Some wheeze about a step-ladder. Anyhow, he called me a buffoon. 'You never know where to draw the line, Crockerton. You're a perfect buffoon.' Ever seen Burphie with his shirt out? We must arrange it some time. He said he wanted no more to do with me. Just like that."

"What did you do?"

"I said: 'Sewerly not, Algernon: you ain't a-goin' to pass out of my life, har you?' or words to that effect. Told him it'd been a lovely day to-day. No use. All over. *Rien ne va plus*, as they say in France. No. 11.35 for me to Lipscot to-day. But look here, why did *you* get out of it? You're not doing anything, are you? Now then, what's the excuse?"

"Oh, I—" Lawrance was baffled before this inquisition. "Well, he'd asked my sister, and she couldn't come."

"Oh, yes; between ourselves, Burphie's a bit struck on your sister. Mentioned her to me, oh, yes, he did. 'Child of exceptional beauty and refinement.' I rotted him a bit. Hope you don't mind. Oh, he *was* peevish. Sure sign. It was that, really, that set him off. He

said: 'What do you mean? She's a mere girl with her hair down her back,' so I called him a cradle-snatcher, and that made him savage. He didn't half bark at me. Poor old Burph! We *did* have a lively time! Next corner!"

He shot down the steps of the bus. Lawrance followed, feeling as though he were playing a game. He wondered would Deavitt find out that this "sister" was really Olga? It seemed impossible that Deavitt shouldn't find anything out. . . . Deavitt would make a comic picture-postcard business of it, but Lawrance did not resent this suggestion here. That might be the best way of dealing with such things, after all.

After handling the man at the Law Society's Hall with anticipated despatch, Deavitt took agile steps to the tape-machine by the door and scrutinized the moving record.

"Bonny Bird, one," he said with satisfaction. "I backed him for a place as well. That's quite all right. I'm a member here," he went on as they left the building. "Didn't know I was a lawyer, did you? Oh, yes, I'm a bit of an architect, too, on the side. And old Israfel is giving me a tip or two about casting horoscopes. Tracing Royal Descents is my speciality, though. What with that, and being a Director of a Company or two, I manage to rub along somehow."

Lawrance could well imagine his interlocutor hopping spryly from this bough to that of the professions, perched on each for a passing interval, with his head to one side. He certainly should have been, for a time at least, a detective.

"What I'm out for now, ontrer nouse, is a job—a real dairy-fed one—in the A.P.D. I'm off after lunch to

see Colonel Voltalin about it. Old Burph's brother, you know. He's as good as promised me. Pull at the War Office and all the usual extras. Must nail him now before Burphie gets a look in. He might queer my pitch, now that he doesn't love me any mo-er.— Proud and happy to be in His Majesty's Service, sir! Ahem!" He saluted.

"Colonel Voltalin—" said Lawrance vaguely, with a lagging mind.

"Colonel the Honourable Horace Voltalin, D.S.O. Born 1873. That's the merchant. Married 1899, Eva Marion Leggett, only daughter of Major Percival Leggett, of Stapley Grange, South Malling, Kent. *And* has issue: John Frewin, born 1900. Alastair Humphrey, born 1903. Nina, born 1905, and very nice too! Anything *more* you want to know?"

"You're well up in your relatives."

"Relatives? Nothing of the such. I can give you the date of birth of any peer of the realm, and the number of any hymn you know the first line of. Church Hymns *or* Ancient & Modern, we keep 'em both in stock, sir. None of your compliments, Georgie, it's a natural gift. Once seen, never forgotten. I'm not infallible with the offspring and collaterals, but could have a pretty good shot for the bull's eye with most of them. Get a Debrett some time, or a Hymn Book, and test me, cockie. Come along, this is where we get our nosebags on." He led the way into the restaurant.

"I don't drink," he went on as they sat down. "What's yours, red or white? Better choose yourself." He passed over the wine list. "Better have the table d'hôte, hadn't we? Saves time. I'm not much in the

epicure line myself. Usually kick off with soup. Dine in the middle of the day, tea in the evening."

"I wish Colonel Voltalin would get *me* a job," said Lawrance, looking down the list of clarets.

"What, sick of spooking? I read that article of yours on Apports; quite hot stuff. Oh, and we heard all about Marjorie and her Elementals. They haven't been on tap again lately, have they? This little job ought to start them off, though. I suppose we shall both have to trot round at the Inquest, to say nothing of the Police Court proceedings and the balance of the goods, as per invoice. Doesn't look as though they'd get anybody, though, unless the chap who did the trick has been and gone and muffed something." He stopped to drink his soup.

"Why shouldn't it be suicide?"

"Not in these trousers, madam. He's not the sort of merchant who goes and knifes himself. Pretty rank sort of a cuss, between ourselves,—bit too rank, even for a bounder. No, there wasn't much class about Georgie Tofton. My word, wasn't he wild last night?"

Lawrance had a sudden vision of "Georgie" Tofton lying stiff under a sheet, with his chin bound up over his gashed throat, and his little eyes, that would never look pugnacious any more, closed forever. He was gone to a place where there were no distinctions of gentility. And "My word, wasn't he wild last night?" Sudden death—it was amazing. Lawrance's preoccupations with the living during these last few hours had been exclusive.— Perhaps at that moment they were making that "thorough medical examination" of which Ewing had spoken. What had Ewing meant by that?— Sui-

eide or murder, Deavitt could invest it with the motley, bring it within the music-hall area. And why not? thought Lawrance. There was no doubt that Deavitt suited him extremely well. Recognized "wits" had never suited him at all: he secretly detested "refined humour," donnish badinage and repartee; all that made him ill at ease or bored him. Not that he gave any hilarious response, outwardly or inwardly, to his companion's echoes of the entertainers of the populace, but they contented him and kept him going. He would like to ask Deavitt to the house,—to dinner, perhaps. Muriel, he knew, would dislike him, only she would certainly be glad to have him if she knew that he was Lord Burpham's cousin. If she didn't know, she would think that he wasn't "quite a gentleman." Many middleclass people would think that. Lawrance's thoughts turned bitter: he might let her meet Deavitt first, let her throw out her little hints that he wasn't "quite," and then tell her—He caught himself up: he was being detestably mean,—disloyal, too. At the same time there was an instinctive renewal of his resentment against his wife for being so perpetually, so inevitably, the cause of his lapses.—He felt a certain need of Deavitt: the man might easily become a harmless but indispensable drug to him. He ought to have more friends. A man should have friends,—a married man, especially, perhaps. He had only the Flynns. . . .

"Wake up, Percivawl! Your shaving-water's getting cold!" The waiter had brought them the next course, and was standing expectant of the order for wine. "What did you say the number of your dog-license was? Thirty-seven? That's the feller!— By the bye,"—Deavitt lowered his voice as the waiter went. "The

Flynns had better have counsel to watch the case for them at the Inquest. I don't mind paying my whack. I feel a bit mixed up with the show myself, with that 'rag' at tea,—much better all round to have the curtain-drop with the coroner. What do you think?"

"I quite agree with you. I'll tell them. I would certainly like to share the expenses." Lawrance stopped to contemplate the suggestion that Deavitt's baiting of Tofton had led up to the tragedy. He looked at the man, trying vainly to focus him as an instrument of murder.

"Right you are, then. They haven't a telephone in the house, have they? Better telegraph after lunch or write straight away from the Office and send it by messenger. Unless you can go up yourself. But I should be inclined to give them a miss in baulk for to-day; looks better. I can get the man for you; the very merchant we want. R. D. Walsh; ever heard of him? Clever young hound; known him some time, and he won't stick it on too much with the exes. Telephone to me as soon as you hear from Glasden Road. Let's see,—two fifteen now. Your letter ought to reach 'em before five o'clock. You'll still be at the Office then, I suppose? Well, I'll be at the Law Society by four-thirty and I'll stay there till you call me up." The arrival of the waiter with Lawrance's wine caused no interruption. "Here's my regular address." He handed Lawrance a card with an address in Hampstead, and the young man responded by giving him a card of his own. "H'm, Chiswick; yes, I know a man who lives there. One Francis Herbert, Sherbet for short. Couple of kippers, aetat nine and eleven. Quite all right, too, every rod, pole and perch— Wonder if Walsh'll be able to work out any motive for suicide," he went on as the waiter

left them. "That's the real trouble; that's the nasty jar. Coroner may be a bit sniffy."

"Oh, Ewing said something about a medical examination. He seemed to think that would show a motive for suicide—"

"What!" Deavitt's tone cut sharply. "Well, that is luck and no mistake! Just let R. D. W. get his teeth into that!"

"Well, Ewing may be on a wrong tack." Lawrance was hiding his ignorance. Evidently Deavitt had "tumbled" at once to something that he'd missed. "He may be 'off' altogether—"

"Oh, no. Serpentinely not. He's lived in the same house, plenty of tuniopporty for observing his habits. Medical examination—of course that can only mean one thing, in that connection." Deavitt looked quickly up at his companion, who tried to appear as though he discreetly understood. "Oh, by the way, that girl Doris is in trouble, of course you know that?"

"Trouble?"

"Usual kind. Penny plain. No doubt whatevuar! And I shouldn't be at all surprised if Georgie Tofton—You see—?"

Lawrance gulped his wine. He felt embarrassed and bewildered. How stupid and unobservant he must be!

"Dear, dear! Whatever are we coming to, Maria?" It never seemed necessary for Deavitt to pause for meditation. "Well, really, constable, I don't know *what* to say!"

Lawrance felt as though he, certainly, didn't. He was completely in the dark, and prevented from demanding illumination by his fear of looking an innocent fool. He was, as a fact, innocent,—at least in the sense that

he lacked man-of-the-world astuteness in a marked degree.

The rest of the meal was rather hurried.

"Time we were drawing stumps pretty soon," Deavitt remarked, and after that he spoke little. Lawrance noticed that he relished his apple-tart, and wondered if this relish went with his taste for children.

"Your sister lives with you?"

The young man blushed at the question put casually to him as they went out. Deavitt would certainly detect him, he reflected again. "Oh, no: I'm married, you know."

"Yes, I know you are. Can't keep anything like that dark, can you, guv'nor?— Well, good-bye. I'm off to rub noses with the Colonel. You'll write that letter as soon as poss., won't you? Hear from you later in the afternoon. There's your bus to Fishgate Street!"

CHAPTER XXIII

LAWRANCE, working slowly and badly, stayed on at the Office until he was able to telephone Deavitt the Flynns' consent to Mr. R. D. Walsh. Mr. Flynn had said: "As you like, as you like; very good of you," with a shade of surprise and more than a shade of indifference. "They've had the medical examination," he added, with an unfamiliar cunning triumph in his deep old voice, "and he's rotten through and through!— Ewing's the best chap in the world!" Lawrance was still puzzled.

He returned, weighted, to Chiswick, after taking a late and dawdling tea at a little shop near Liverpool Street, for the sake of further postponement. When he reached home it was nearly seven o'clock. He stumbled at the door. Muriel, rather flushed and nervous, came quickly from the dining room as he was in the hall. "How late you are!" she cried. "Father's here. He'll be down in a minute. I must go and dress."

"Anything the matter?"

"Oh,—no—" She turned from him and went rapidly upstairs.

Lawrance did not follow her. He washed his hands in the little lavatory on the ground floor: it seemed that he kept clearer of them by doing that and not going upstairs, where Muriel would be taking things off pegs in her wardrobe, and where his father-in-law, in the spare room, was no doubt at that moment putting on his cler-

ical evening-coat or brushing his grey thin hair very smoothly over his elderly scalp. The young man felt indecently invaded. His thoughts turned heavily to his father-in-law. Why had he come up from Essex in this unexpected way? Perhaps he was giving a lecture or preaching a sermon in London.

The Reverend Henry Gleasom Knight was an eloquent clergyman, a great worker with tongue and pen. He was "broad" in his Church views, being especially given to discourses upon the theme: "For if a man love not his brother whom he hath seen, how shall he love God whom he hath not seen?" "Service and brotherhood," these were his watchwords: he was of the Kingsley school, modified by more modern liberalities in dogma: he resulted, on the whole, from Kingsley, Jowett, and Matthew Arnold. Later Victorian Socialism had affected him; he talked a great deal about "equality of opportunity," and often declared that Society was a physical organism; if the lower members suffered there must be suffering throughout. But his strain of Socialism was not at all dangerous, either to him or to any one else: in fact, it increased his popularity among the upper and middle classes, while the lower classes, on a very sure instinct, made no account of it at all. Mr. Knight was a capable organizer, as well as an effective popular speaker. He was always occupied,—by getting up new schemes for the improved working of "Kingsley Hall" or the "William Morris Hostel," by travelling to and from meetings and lectures, by making subscription lists "go," by writing innumerable letters. He kept in continuous touch with men of note, was personally acquainted with nearly all the bishops and with many of the writers and politicians of the day. A few years

back he had published a book: "Some Tritons: by a Minnow," which had had a great success. It was full of humorous anecdotes about notabilities: "observant," "modest," and "witty" were the epithets chiefly applied to the author,—some critics even spoke of his "inimitable dry humour,"—while praise was given to the "conversational ease" of his style. He had two curates for his parish in Essex, and they were needed. For some time he had been a widower, and he had only one child besides Muriel,—a boy rather her junior, who was then at the front.

Lawrance, in the drawing-room, awaited the object of his meditations, awaited this successful and influential cleric, this firmly standing example of a happily active and useful life. The young man's first irritation at the intrusion was wearing off: at any rate he would not, he reflected, have to be alone with Muriel. After dinner Mr. Knight would produce his cigar-case,—one of the numerous objects of grateful presentation in his possession,—and would say, as he always did: "Have a cigar, my boy?—ah, I forgot you don't smoke." Mr. Knight had a resonant full voice, but its quality was growing rather harsh, rather untuneable, from continual and careless use. At that moment Lawrance heard it from above: "Ah,—Oliver back? Well, I'll go down then." He did not speak with his usual professional geniality.

A minute later he stood before his son-in-law, whose hand he took, but without any warmth of clasp.

"I've not come on a pleasant errand, Oliver," he said, shutting the door. "Not at all on a pleasant errand."

He sat down, crossed his legs, and began tapping the floor with his foot. He looked as though his importance

were aided and abetted by the gravity of the occasion.

"I'm sorry to hear that," said Lawrance, with a sense of the need of being on the defensive.

"I wish to make an appeal to you!" The parson fixed him with his chilly bright grey eyes.

"An appeal—?"

Lawrance, looking back at him, was struck, why, he could not determine, by the man's vulgarity. He had not noticed before that all fineness of tone seemed to have been stamped out from those broad adequate serviceable features, which had only the illusion of being strong, which were really pretentious, and, in essence, both coarse and cheap. The lips, held firmly together, could be detected as gross and mean under the thick well-kept moustache. All the expression seemed made-up. The directness of the gaze was tutored, it did not come from any frankness of spirit. There was a common squareness about the jowl. Lawrance thought of old Flynn in contrast. He hardened stubbornly.

"Yes," said Mr. Knight, after the proper pause. "Muriel is very unhappy."

"You mean that I am to blame?"

"I *know* that you are to blame.— I am not speaking to you as a clergyman, Oliver; I wish to speak as man to man,—as man-of-the-world—for I think I may call myself a man-of-the-world,—*to* man-of-the-world." This, he thought, would flatter his son-in-law, and open the way well. "It is a matter of *human* relationship."

"Do you think that I've treated Muriel inhumanly?"

"I didn't say that. I was prepared to believe—I wished to believe—that what you had done had been without full intent." He sighed.

"What have I done, Mr. Knight?"

"Oliver: I'm afraid we shall have to be prepared for some very plain speaking." He thrust his chin out.

"There's nothing I should like better."

"I must tell you, then, that I have taken steps to acquaint myself in detail with your movements during the past two weeks."

"Oh. You mean you have employed detectives? Well?"

"The past two weeks include, of course, yesterday night."

"How long did your detectives stay up in Glasden Road?" Lawrance could not help playing into the clergyman's hands by showing some agitation. The association of detectives with yesterday night alarmed him for the Flynns.

"Till you left—naturally—till you left." Mr. Knight had a moment's triumph, but he was immediately puzzled by his son-in-law's relief. "I have full information as to the—er—course that you took *after* leaving Glasden Road. A girl barely over the age of consent!"

"You know nothing about it!"

"Pardon me. I know *everything* about it."

Lawrance looked at him, hesitated, then said angrily: "We won't discuss it!" His tone irritated the other extremely: it was an unexpected, an outrageous tone, for a husband so utterly in the wrong, and so soundly proven to be.

"Indeed you are right. Discussion would serve no useful purpose whatever. I did not come to you to discuss; I came, as I said, to appeal. I want—"

"Judging from what you've done, I should have thought you wanted evidence for the Divorce Courts."

Lawrance had never felt himself so cold,—so set and framed against any capitulation.

“You would have been wrong.” Mr. Knight was steadying his temper. “My conscience—and Muriel’s conscience—could never sanction divorce. ‘Those whom God hath joined.’ Whatever my antagonists may be pleased to say, I am no false and compromising Lati-tudinarian.— Besides, you are a young man, Oliver. I’m not one of those who believe that a single lapse blackens a life or a character forever. I hope I know the world too well for that. I hope my views are more liberal. They are known as more liberal.” Again he threw his importance into relief. “No one has ever yet accused me of being wanting in charity. I may say that I am not employing the—er—Agency further. I am convinced that this is your first breach of your marriage vow, and I feel very hopeful—more than hopeful—that it will be your last. Surely it will be, if only you can bring yourself to consider all that is entailed.”

He rose, feeling the need of a posture that he associated more familiarly with speech. Lawrance sat with his chin between his hands, determined on silence.

“Your wife’s happiness is at stake, the whole future of her unborn child. At such a period in your lives as this!— Oliver, I must bring it all clearly to you. There is no one else to do it: if ever a duty were marked clearly, it is my duty at the present time. Do you wonder that I feel strongly, do you wonder that I felt myself bound to take steps that would, I hoped, convince Muriel that she had no grounds for her fears? Do you wonder, now that it is conclusively proved that she *had* grounds, do you wonder that I should, as a father and a Christian, most earnestly entreat you to turn and stand

before you go further,—before you go too far? I hope I am no Pharisee. We are all human. No one knows that better than I. Yes, these unhappy infatuations are human enough,—temptations in the way of our nature. I hold up no hands of horror. Far be it from me, Oliver, to draw away the hem of my garment,—” Lawrance cast an automatic glance at the well-kept clerical evening-coat and the carefully cut black trousers—“to make broad—er—you understand. That is not the line I would take at all, not at all. I grant that it may seem a sacrifice to you,—may *seem*, I say, for I am really appealing to you, not to make a sacrifice, but to avoid a disaster,—a disaster for yourself no less than for others. I ask you to reflect, I ask you to be wise. What can come of this miserable sordid affair, in the end? I think you cannot have considered. Only unhappiness. Unhappiness for yourself, for this girl, for Muriel, for your child. It is no light thing to shatter the whole structure and fabric of a marriage. Mind you, I do not say it has come to that: it has not,—yet: it need not. There is one remedy, only,—one prophylactic, as I may say: it is that remedy that I urge; in all candour, in all sincerity, and with all singleness of heart. It is a remedy that lies in your hands.” He paused. “Self-control.” He paused again. “Let us leave Christianity out of it.” The Reverend Henry Gleasom Knight made a speciality of “leaving Christianity out of it.” “Remember the Greeks. Remember the virtues that that great ancient race—pagan they were, but glorious,—held so dear. *Aidōs*. *Mēden agan*. *Sophrosunē*. Do those high words mean nothing to us now? Surely, in this hour of our national trial, when above

all we are coming to learn 'Self-knowledge, self-reverence, self-control,' surely now they have a meaning, and a real one." Lawrance felt sure that he was listening to an extract from one of his father-in-law's latest public discourses. Another of Mr. Knight's specialities was "topical reference." "Sacrifices are being made on every side, and made gladly. You cannot take your part as other young men are taking it; I know that, I know you would if you could. All are not called upon to give the same measure. But this other sacrifice, this you *can* make—"

"Really, sir, I don't see how my giving up Ol—how this particular 'sacrifice' would help us to win the war."

"I was not speaking from the practical point of view, Oliver." Mr. Knight replied with the competent asperity that he always showed when he was heckled. "I was thinking of the spirit. There is a certain sympathy of sacrifice." He made a gesture which, like all his gestures, was fitting and auxiliatory, not rudely lavish. "If you would only, bravely and resolutely, break this intrigue—"

"It's not an intrigue! I told you before that you understood nothing about it—"

"Pardon me." Mr. Knight held up his hand. He was much annoyed that his oration had not produced a more promising impression. "I understand that my daughter is suffering. I understand that she has cause. I understand very positively that the most unfortunate possible results have followed from your intimacy with this particular family in Glasden Road—"

"You can understand further that this intimacy will continue!"

The clergyman looked at his son-in-law. Inwardly exasperated and indignant, he tried to appear saddened and calm.

"I cannot believe," he said, "that if you knew the true character of these people—"

"What do you mean?" Lawrance was roused at once. "I do know it!" He got up.

"Oh. You know that the old man is a drunkard and a thief? That he was dismissed from the Thurston Line for stealing money when he was purser in the Company's service? You know that the woman who lives with him—lives with him in sin—"

"If you say anything against her, I'll strike you." Lawrance spoke without passion, but he was noticeably pale.

"You will—" Mr. Knight started, but instantly recovered himself. "I am exposed to you," he said, in a tone of quiet resignation. "I am an old man."

There was a heavy fall of silence. Lawrance turned and moved towards the door. The clergyman was now thoroughly enraged. He had his phrase for Doris—"The eldest daughter is little better than a woman of the town"—on his lips: he did not at all want to miss saying that and other things.

"It's past the time for dinner," said Lawrance sullenly. "It's a quarter to eight."

"I understood from Muriel that dinner was not to be till eight o'clock to-night."

"Oh; so as to give you an opportunity—" The young man's laugh increased Mr. Knight's anger.

"So as to give *you* an opportunity, sir!" the clerical voice rasped.

"I shall not take advantage of it."

"You know, I suppose, what happened at your friends' house last night?"

"Certainly I know. I was there this morning."

"Oh." Mr. Knight was again disappointed. He had kept this back, hoping to be able to shock and surprise. "You are no doubt anxious to be mixed up in that sordid and horrible business?"

"I am not anxious to back out of it if I can be of any use. I shall probably be summoned to the inquest." Lawrance's tone was one of satisfaction. He hoped, now, that he would be summoned.

"I trust you will find it a congenial occasion."

"You think, I suppose, that I ought to break with my friends now that they are in trouble?"

"An utter distortion and perversion of my position!" The clergyman spoke sharply and loudly. "You know perfectly well why I ask you to break with them. There is no connection whatever. I have no interest at all in this shocking affair of the boarder. I have not even mentioned it till now. It has nothing to do with the point at issue— When I came up this afternoon I had not even heard of it!"

His indignation was cumulative. And he had been so forbearing, so considerate, so delicate, so full of tact! All wasted. Seeing his son-in-law move again towards the door, he continued:

"I understand, then—clearly—that in spite of all I have said, you intend to continue your illicit relations with this girl—daughter of a dishonest scoundrel and an adulteress—waiving what else there *may* be—and sister of a common strumpet! You can strike me if you wish." Lawrance had advanced threateningly. "I am speaking the truth. Men have suffered before now for

that offence." Lawrance turned contemptuously away. "I may tell you that there is no doubt whatever," the clergyman went gluttonously on, "no doubt whatever that the eldest sister is *onsant*." His tone displayed the peculiar grossness of moral people. As Lawrance did not break the pause, he continued: "You won't give her up, this girl who is your mistress!"

The man's face was blotched with red: loose ridges of his face and neck were in unnatural prominence, and his large white hands shook in spite of his efforts to control them. He would let himself be struck, he had determined: he would let himself be struck. Then he would take Muriel away.

But Lawrance had no inclination to strike now. It had suddenly impressed him as important to defend Olga. The word "mistress" stung him from this man who was the father of his wife. It was dishonouring.

"She isn't my mistress!"

"Ah! Not perhaps in the full sense of the—"

"Not in any sense. She's—"

"You'll admit at least that you've had every opportunity—?" Mr. Knight was sarcastic.

"Yes." Lawrance paused; then in a deadened tone.

"I have had every opportunity."

"That is certainly so."

"You can think what you like!" The young man flamed again. "She's as pure as any girl in England!" Mr. Knight shrugged his shoulders and Lawrance loathed him. "And I wouldn't lower her—not lower her below your daughter, sir, you can be sure of that—if you can understand it! Muriel shan't have that advantage! But I won't give Olga up—nor her family;

not though you were to talk at me for weeks together. So we may as well stop this."

"Indeed, yes. Bitterness and vindictiveness can serve no useful purpose—"

"I wish I'd been unfaithful—with anybody—a hundred times, and I wish I hadn't given you the satisfaction of knowing that I haven't been!"

Mr. Knight shrugged his shoulders again. He was careful, however, not to imply by speech that Lawrance was a liar.

"So long as you don't give her up," he said, "my daughter's happiness is ruined, her life is poisoned—the life of an innocent woman—whatever your actual relations may be. Facts are hard things. You will scarcely deny, I suppose"—he could not resist a sneering tone—"that your—er—attentions to this girl are not strictly compatible with the marriage vow. 'Who-soever looketh on a woman'—I need not remind you."

"I don't want to deny anything." Lawrance opened the door.

Mr. Knight remained by the farther wall, as though holding his ground. His flush had ebbed: his ruffled cheeks were paler than usual as the door shut.

"I must get out of it," thought Lawrance. "I must get out of it." He realized that Muriel's vanity would always prevent their living apart.

He went into the dining room. The girl Mary was there, occupied with something or other at the side-board. She turned as he came in: the background of her trained expression seemed grave and hostile. Lawrance was surprised: this must be, he thought, mere imagination on his part. Ever since that Marble Arch

affair he had been conscious of a pleasant physical sympathy with Mary, a sympathy that did not in the least encroach upon his passion for Olga, that, rather, held that passion fixed or threw it into a light less wavering. Mary reassured him. Yet he hardly thought of her as a person; he drew from the sex of her a certain ease and repose, a sense of having the right ground under his feet.

“Is dinner nearly ready, Mary?”

“Yes, sir. I think in five or ten minutes.” She went out. How nice her rosy cheeks were, and her chestnut hair!

Lawrance sighed. Suppose he had been married to a girl like Mary? There were plenty of girls of his own class like her, enough like her in character and in physical traits. They were the best girls, though he couldn't love any of that type as he so alarmingly and ungovernably loved Olga. Would girls like Mary be jealous? Of course they would. No doubt Mary was hostile to him now because she had overheard some of that conversation with Mr. Knight. Poor Mary! she couldn't understand. He thought of Muriel, but could feel no pity or indulgence for her. Muriel was now irrevocably alien to him. She was the “injured wife,” he could not forgive her for that: he could not soften to her.

He went upstairs, with no reason for doing so, just as he had gone into the dining room. He wondered at the physical fastidiousness that Muriel had stirred in him lately and that had kept him from her; he had never experienced it before: it was strong. And her coldness of temperament made it stronger. A dash of animalism in her would have lessened the strain on him of her personality, which was like a thin tight ribbon al-

ways bound to his forehead. There was nothing in Muriel for merging, nothing for healing.

He had walked on to the end of the passage, and was standing outside Mary's room. There were no separate quarters in the house for servants, no backstairs. The door of the room was not quite closed. He hesitated, then turned and went to his own room. "Room," he thought, "—blood," and wondered at the association, till he remembered Tofton. Tofton, however, seemed very unimportant. Lawrance was sure that the man could never have had any power against Olga. Still, he was glad that he was dead, if only his death made no trouble. He sat on his bed and closed his eyes. He felt tired.

He wanted some one—some woman—to support him in his relation with Olga. He felt this need of support keenly. He was neither strong enough nor insensitive enough to deal with Olga by himself. What he demanded was the co-operation of a physical and mental rapport with a girl of type sufficiently opposed to Olga to bring balance—equipoise. Suppose that he could have two wives—Olga and Mary? Was that fantastic? Lawrance knew that he was the very reverse of fantastic, he had always thought himself particularly rational. With Mary, or with a woman of her mould, he could keep his love for Olga unspoilt, he could deal more delicately and more truly with it, he could avoid mistakes, he could be steadier with her. And he would be tenderer to the complementary Mary girl because of his passion for Olga—tenderer, more tolerant, less ready to tire. Would women ever realize that it could be like this—reasonably like this—or would they go on wanting it all, under the spur of some primitive subconscious fear? Would they go on wanting it all, and so spoiling

it all? Lawrance did not feel immoral; he was too much preoccupied: besides, he was not contemplating action. He did not for a moment see himself, in accomplished fact, with Olga on his right hand and Mary on his left.

He went out into the passage, and again walked up to Mary's door. He did not hesitate now. He pushed it open and looked in. Everything was strange: a room in his own house, but quite new to him, not at all like any of the other rooms. By the door was a chest of drawers that he had never seen, a chest of the colour of pale linoleum, made perhaps of some kind of imitation maple. Ugly, certainly. On it was a number of framed photographs—frames standing on teased and twisted spindles of whitish metal, frames decorated by metal lovers'-knots and metal roses. There was a family group, a young man in khaki, with a blown-out face, a plain-faced girl in nurse's uniform.—Lawrance's glance was cursory, withdrawn at once, he felt ashamed of it. He felt all that rebuke of inanimate things that are deeply the personal property of another, things spied upon, so silently affronted. His shame quickened. His intrusion upon those photographs seemed abominable: never before had he been shocked by himself in that way. The invasion of almost any privacy would have been less outrageous. He stared at the carpet. The carpet was familiar. Yes, it used to be in the dining-room, it had been cut off from the old dining-room carpet— Muriel, of course, knew all these details: how different a woman's life was from a man's!— Mary's bare feet on that carpet—night and morning! How curious! how very incongruous! That picture, too,—of a doctor bending over a sick child's bed,—he recognized that: he had disliked it, he had told Muriel, and then it had dis-

appeared. Muriel had often tried to please him, but how little difference that made.— His eyes wandered along the wall to a framed text and a Christmas Number reproduction of a picture of a little girl with a dog. Pinned on the walls were portraits, evidently cut out of newspapers, of British and Allied Generals, arranged so as to make a sort of pattern— No, he had no right to know that she did that. That was more unpardonable than looking at her photographs. He drew back, startled simultaneously by his own caddishness and by the sound of the gong.

“Oliver! What on earth are you doing? Where’s Mary?” Muriel addressed him from the other end of the passage: but her voice did not startle him at all.

“Oh, she’s downstairs, of course.”

“Well—”

She looked at him, puzzled, as he walked towards the head of the stairs. He stood by to let her pass, and she did so, markedly erect. Her gown was slightly décolleté, showing the fair skin, smooth and faintly pink, in the hollow below her neck. Lawrance, seeing, held back. His flesh bristled and stiffened, as for something at enmity with his blood.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE next morning—a Sunday—was bright and mild, with promise for summer. Lawrance, at breakfast, felt no more embarrassment in the presence of his wife and father-in-law than he had at dinner the evening before. It seemed that they had nothing to do with him. He was aloof and suspended in a region shadowed by anticipations, the form and substance of which were not shown, but which bade him, surely, to wait. His mind made a sound for him like the sound of rippling water, going on and on. He had slept profoundly, without dreams. His whole system was lapped about in a reaction of repose.

After breakfast Muriel brought him a letter. "I don't think you saw this yesterday," she said. "It came by the last post. It's from Malstowe."

He took it, thanking her, not looking at her, wondering how he had missed it. His invariable habit was to look for his letters in the hall, at the regular post-times.

The handwriting was unfamiliar, but he guessed at once that the letter was from the Malstowe doctor, although the four weeks agreed upon were not yet up. So Doctor Peachey would not have written unless he had come to the conclusion that Letty had better be taken away. And of course she had: of course she must avoid that season of summer distraction at Malstowe. Lawrance examined the envelope, he was unwilling to open it at once. He would take his sister abroad: it was not

an occasion for half-measures. Doctor Peachey had mentioned St. Franz in Switzerland as a later possible place.— No event, Lawrance reflected with great satisfaction, could have been more happily timed. He would get clear. That was exactly what he wanted. Ingrainedly English, he had been secretly all the while demanding a moral pretext for desired action. Now he had it: it was his duty that would liberate him from his domestic life.

He welcomed the opportunity of procrastinating with Olga. At a distance from her he could, he thought, still be her lover: yet he could not commit himself to the relation that must follow if they remained lovers here in London: of that relation he was, for all his passion, almost virginally afraid, when he was not with the girl. Indeed his very passion, romantically enhancing significances, was mainly responsible for his fear. Again, he had declared to Mr. Knight that Olga would not be his mistress because as a mistress her position would be inferior to Muriel's—an utterly factitious reason brought forward for the effect of startling and exasperating Muriel's father. For all that he was bound by this declaration, and he would not admit to himself his motive in making it: with the result that his only alternative was to believe that he had meant what he said. This belief had begun to brew in him, by a process to which he was not privy, and from which he instinctively turned aside. More importantly, the girl's response to him of the morning before stayed him in security, abetting his delay.

Then, too, Olga's family was freshly under calamity. It was not right, it was indecent, to take such a time as this. She would realize that, surely: she would under-

stand. But yet Lawrance, disquietingly for a moment which he soon evaded, knew that she would not, that she was not of his race, that she had not any instinct for Anglo-Saxon observances. The young man did not look forward, in any kind of detail, to what should happen after he came back from St. Franz; he had no logical previsions, and was not troubled by the lack. It was enough that he had, now, under these various defined and partly defined compulsions, to take his course. He was as sure with himself as he had been with Mr. Knight that he would not give Olga up: apart from that, he had no formed intent; certainly no intent either to boldly break his inhibitions against taking her fully, or to hug them to him as sacred forever. He did vaguely contemplate the future as pregnant with circumstances of change: and he had the palpable reflection that Olga would be older. Her being now only sixteen was, to his instinct as well as to his morality, a further check: but again, it was a check that operated much less strongly when she was with him. Then, he was mainly forced by blind stubbornness, blind honour: by his being blindly chaste.

The contents of the Malstowe letter were much as he had expected. He had not looked for bad news of Letty, and Doctor Peachey's first words assured him that her physical symptoms were not as yet alarming. But the doctor was increasingly inclined to give St. Franz a trial. He had been weighing the case carefully and had now concluded that the general effect of a complete change would be good, that it would divert his patient's mind in the right way and gratify her restlessness. He could not say that she was getting any better at Malstowe. He felt pretty sure that she would be ready to

go. "I think," he added significantly, "that it would be better for Miss Lawrance to be for awhile with strangers." This meant, Lawrance reflected, one of two things, either that her mother was an irritation to Letty in her particular state,—this was likely, there had always been a certain amount of veiled discord between the two,—or that young Phillips's company was disturbing. Perhaps both these conditions were in the doctor's mind. He understood clearly, of course, that Letty would be taken to St. Franz by Lawrance and not by her stationary mother. The conclusion of the letter was occupied by reassuring reflections upon the ability of the specialists at the Swiss resort, the excellent ordering of the sanitarium, and the properties of the air, especially curative when the disease was in an early stage.

Lawrance, hearing the jagged reverberations of his father-in-law's voice from the little room they called the study, went there with his letter, which he handed at once to Muriel.

"Doctor Peachey thinks I ought to take Letty to St. Franz," he said.

"Indeed." Mr. Knight started. "I trust she is no worse."

"Oh, no, but she'd be better off under specialized treatment, and in that air."

They were silent while Muriel read the letter. She looked questioningly at her husband as she handed it back.

"What do you think?" he asked.

"Oh—I—I really don't know. I suppose you must—I—" Her lip trembled, she looked vexed and unhappy.

"May I read the letter?" Mr. Knight impressively asked. Lawrance gave it to him. "Ah— Ah. Yes."

Muriel, as her father read, went over to the window, and sat down, looking away from them. "Your mother, I suppose, could hardly undertake—? No, I suppose that would be out of the question. Your Office work—that could be arranged—?"

"Oh, they won't much like it. But I can send them stuff from St. Franz. They can't very well dismiss me, you know, and they wouldn't, anyhow. I couldn't let the Office stand in the way.— My mother would make up any money loss that we couldn't conveniently bear ourselves."

"Quite so. Quite. Well, dear Muriel, you would of course come to me. Most certainly. I must say that all this seems to me—er—in a sense—providential." He cleared his throat, and, after a silence, added: "Let us hope that St. Franz will completely restore your sister. I feel that it will. I feel that she will find there what she—er—really needs. You would, I take it, propose to start soon?"

"I shall write to Letty and to Doctor Peachey to-day. There's no reason why we shouldn't start this week. I thought of asking her to come up to London as soon as possible—by the day after to-morrow, perhaps. We shall have to get passports, of course." It was before the stringency of the "Green Forms."

"Your mother will not oppose it?"

Lawrance shook his head. "Shall I ask Letty to stay with us?" He turned to Muriel, who was still sitting by the window.

"Oh, no!" she said quickly; then: "I mean of course, why, yes."

"Oh, it isn't *necessary*. She has plenty of friends in London."

"It's only that I didn't quite want—just now—" Muriel broke off. Her husband was embarrassingly surprised to notice that she was nearly crying.

Mr. Knight made a little gesture.

"Ah, yes!" His tone was conciliatory and reasonable. "We can understand. I think we can understand, Oliver. Now why not leave the whole affair in my hands? I ought to get back to Chepston in time for the Children's Service this afternoon. Now don't you think—?"

"Yes! That's what I should like—I should like to come with you to-day!" Muriel spoke with a violent mingling of defiance, insecurity, fear, and self-pity.

"Well, now, there we are! What do you say, Oliver?"

"Oh, all right." Lawrance was piqued, although the arrangement suited him perfectly. Further he was puzzled by the expression that Muriel now wore. She looked hurt. He had never seen her look hurt, in that curious animal way.

"That's settled, then!" The clergyman went briskly and cheerfully on. "And I do believe for the best: yes, I think so, I think so. You can arrange, Muriel dear, for an early lunch?—and get through your packing while I'm at St. Saviour's? The servants can come down later, after Oliver and Letty have left. A good plan: I think it's an excellent plan. They can bring down your heavy luggage. Quite enough accommodation for them all at the Rectory. You know I only have a Belgian refugee woman to do all the work of the house, since Gerald went off to Flanders. War economy—the simple life, ah ha!" He had quite recaptured his professional geniality. "But I admit she's a good cook. Your peo-

ple can just take possession. Might release one of them for war-work, perhaps? I'm in touch with a number of organizations. That pretty parlourmaid looks as if she'd be quite up to making munitions. Anyhow, I'll be pressing them all into service for the harvest later on, you'll see! Well, it's after half-past ten."

He hurried off to church. Lawrance, alone with Muriel, felt acutely uncomfortable.

"What's the matter?" was all he could say.

"Oh, do leave me alone!" she went to the door.

"It's all right, isn't it?" he asked feebly. "I mean it suits you, it's what you want."

"I—" She looked at him quickly, then looked away. "I despise you," she said.

"You—what?" He was astounded. "Muriel! What did you say?"

"I despise you," she repeated.

He stared at her, shocked. "I can't see—I can't—Why do you?"

"Because of everything. *Everything*. And I should think that girl would despise you too. She will." The muscles about Muriel's mouth were working unevenly, making her face seem thinner.

"What did your father tell you?"

She left without answering him. Because she was going to cry, he wondered? She seemed very near tears, but he was not sure. He did not wonder if she really despised him, her tone had convinced him that she did; but his thoughts galled one another's heels in disordered speculation on the cause of her feeling: he protested to himself all the while that he had done nothing to deserve it, protested with pride deeply hurt. She might hate him, be angry with him, that would be natural.—

Had her father told her that he had declared that Olga was not his mistress, and did Muriel believe it and despise him in consequence? Well then, all the more he would hold back! But it was incredible: unless—as indeed Lawrance had of late dimly suspected—women had a secret code of morality quite different from the codes of men. The young man's present passing suspicion that Muriel's jealousy and animosity were heightened by her knowledge of his abstinence was the most dimly fluttering of all.— Perhaps Mr. Knight had told her that he kept from Olga for fear of putting his wife in a position of superiority to the girl. That would naturally have angered her, and she might be retaliating. Lawrance's pride preferred this as an explanation.

CHAPTER XXV

THE solitary husband embraced his solitariness fully. After Muriel and her father had left that afternoon he kept to the house, taking in the enjoyment of the silence, the ease, the relief. There was an agreeable crepitation of emptiness in his ears. All the afternoon he stayed in, although the weather remained tempting for out-of-doors. He wrote, carefully, to Letty, to Doctor Peachey, and to his mother: then he read the Sunday paper, and was shocked by the gross intrusion upon him of a reproduction of a photograph of Mrs. Flynn familiar in the Glasden Road dining room for years past. In reproduction the portrait was distorted to a new grotesqueness. It was her face seen in a cruel dream—it was dead matter wickedly galvanized to life-in-nightmare. Above it was the headline: "Inexplicable Tragedy in the Glasden Road." There was also a photograph, probably taken in the 'nineties, of a fat young man in a straw hat, bow tie and 'wing' collar, a photograph that Lawrance had never seen before and that he did not recognize at first. But the 'Mr. Claude Tofton' printed underneath informed him. 'Mr. Claude Tofton'! And he, like the Emperor Maximilian or King Henry of Navarre, was dead. Were they, then, equal now? Could death level so far as that? It seemed impossible. That, at least, could not be the true philosophy. Lawrance, in the face of the culminating and

silent fact of death, was momentarily conscious that he had no philosophy at all, that "philosophy" was merely a name that he needed for use in his articles and reviews, that it meant no more to him than any key of his typewriter. He shuffled uncomfortably in his mind, and set to read the report of the "Inexplicable Tragedy." It was much the same as that of the evening paper of the day before, only more diffuse: but the last sentence set him pondering: "The deceased man had been suffering from a certain ailment for some little time past, and it is understood that the medical evidence on this point may prove to be of no inconsiderable importance."

"A certain ailment"! Of course. Lawrance understood now. Except that he changed colour slightly and held the paper rigidly before him, he gave no outward sign, nor did his thoughts find words. But he knew now what the will to murder was like, he knew just how it paid no heed.

Mary at that moment came in with a tray and tea-things.

"Would you wish your tea here, sir?" He was in the little "study."

"What is it?" He answered with an absent automatic smile. "Oh, yes, I'll have some tea."

"I'll bring it in a few minutes."

Lawrance's eyes rested on the girl's face. Her expression seemed changed, she looked more competent for herself, more independent, more decided. He was conscious of not wanting her to go.

"Oh—Mary," he said slowly, "do you like this arrangement? This going down to Mr. Knight's?"

"I'm not going, sir." She flushed a little.

"Oh!"

"No, sir. I've been thinking it over, like. I don't feel as I wish to.— I was wanting to ask you for the mistress's address, sir, because I'd better write and tell her."

"What will you do, then?"

"Oh, I'll go home, to Ealing. I shall get another place, sir."

"But why do you want to make the change, Mary,—if I'm not inquisitive?"

"Only that I don't feel as I wish to—" She looked at the floor.

"All right: but I'm sorry. I—I liked your being here, you know."

"But you're going away, sir, aren't you?"

"Oh, I'm coming back—of course. Don't you think, Mary—I mean, of course you know what's best for yourself—but couldn't you think it over a little more?" After that newspaper account he was particularly reluctant to lose her.

"I don't feel as I wish to go to Mr. Knight's." She again repeated her phrase.

"Well, maybe you'll come back to us later on—when we're in this house again?"

"I don't hardly know about that, sir." She spoke unexpectedly proudly.

Lawrance involuntarily sighed. He felt vaguely that the full weight of Muriel would be thrown on him if this girl were not there. But after all, that was in the future.

"Well, Mary—of course—"

He stopped, suddenly ashamed, presented by the comic postcard view of his taking an opportunity with his servant in his wife's absence. He remembered an actual

postcard—a young man, with a shiny gallivanting air, embracing a girl in cap and apron, while a fat cook, outside the door, was stooping, her eye to the keyhole.

“All right. I’ll give you the address.”

He compelled himself to a tone of finality, and Mary left him. When she returned with the tea and buttered toast he pretended to be reading and they neither of them spoke.

Lawrance, still under the grinning tyranny of popular ridicule, forbade himself a visit to the Flynns that evening. He refused, on his dignity, the rôle of the playing mouse. For hours he sat, trying to read a “psychic” work that he had to review, his mind striking out violently every other minute to that bestial horror of Tofton’s “certain ailment” and all that it had threatened. If only he had known before! He would have gone for him, knocked him down, horsewhipped him, kicked him out of the house, the man would not have dared to come back, he would have taken good care. . . . Why hadn’t they told him everything? And Doris . . . he thought of what Deavitt had hinted about Doris, in connection with Tofton. If that were true, would it come out, and would it strengthen the argument for suicide or for murder? Logically for murder, perhaps, but the jury’s sympathies would certainly be favourably touched. They would not want to bring in a verdict that might be hostile to the relatives of the injured girl. Olga—Olga would have been safe anyhow, he knew,—safe from that ultimate double abomination. He would not think of it; he drew breath.— Was there any proof? No hint of proof of murder had been given in either of the newspaper reports. There were no signs of a struggle, the bedroom door had been locked: but had

it been locked from the inside, and where had the key been found? Deavitt, who was a lawyer, had said that they couldn't bring it home to anybody.

For the first time Lawrance brought himself to the attempt to imagine what might have happened. Tofton drunk, probably,—a scene with Doris—the intervention of the old man and Mrs. Flynn—Tofton using physical force against them—retaliation, self-defence, then a despatch of the matter, in terror and rage, by the one possessed of the razor. Was that possible? Mrs. Flynn had not done it; he believed her denial. Doris—impossible: it was the Mariner, of course. And Ewing must know all about it: how to figure Ewing as a secret repository of bloody knowledge? “Ewing’s the best chap in the world!” He remembered old Flynn’s emphatic declaration.

But, after all, why shouldn’t Tofton have killed himself? He was diseased; “rotten through and through”—what strain on that point, though!—No, Tofton would never have done it. He wasn’t, as Deavitt saw, that sort; he couldn’t have cut his own throat with a razor. But the jury wouldn’t know that.

All the afternoon and evening Lawrance had been attentive for the ring of the telephone. If they called him up from Glasden Road, he would go. He would be “allowed to” then; neither his dignity nor his conscience would rebel. He wanted to go very much, and his desire to be with Olga increased as the hours passed, as the novelty of his being in the house without Muriel began to wear off. He consoled himself by anticipating the to-morrow, when he would certainly be there, when he would see Olga, see his girl. It would be only decent

to go then, it would be unfriendly not to go.— Wasn't it unfriendly not to go now?

The young man rose and walked about the room. He stood by the door, undecided: he wished they had a telephone at Glasden Road. Should he telephone to Deavitt? The inquest would no doubt be to-morrow. He would find out,—early the next morning, he would find out. He decided to leave it till then, because that decision required an effort, and the effort justified him. He began to realize, in spite of himself, that he felt afraid of his next meeting with Olga: he felt a fascinated shrinking. Connectingly he thought of Muriel's "I despise you." Was that why she despised him,—again he asked himself, and now more definitely,—because he held back, because he had this fear? But surely she ought to feel herself protected: could she despise what was her own protection? Ah, but was it? Lawrance knew that his fear of Olga was a measure of his love for her: he did not know that women summon all the materialism of their sex to aid their scorn of this kind of love when it is directed to a rival; and that they may secretly scorn it, and work, though blindly, against it, even when they are its objects themselves.

CHAPTER XXVI

A LETTER from Olga was on the breakfast-table the next morning. Lawrance took it, excited by the handwriting—the small thick inexperienced handwriting, so much a girl's. Could any one else be so much a girl, every way? She was violent in his blood; it was terrible: he had not asked for this. He looked aghast at the little blue envelope: then realized that Mary had come in and was watching him as he looked. She dropped her eyes, hurriedly and painfully. He did not feel angry with her; he wished her well. If only she, too, could somehow come in. He knew that it would be eminently right for all of them, if she could: it was one of those eminently right things that are out of the question, that in our present world, with its Lord Burphams and its Reverend Henry Knights, cannot possibly be.

Lawrance remembered the headmaster of his Public School. This Dr. Ashe would gather the boys together on occasions when any particular breach of discipline had been current, he would speak tersely and resolutely, and always he would wind up by saying: "Now this is one of those things that *must not be*."

When the parlourmaid had gone, Lawrance read the letter:

"I thought you would have come this evening, and I don't see why you didn't come. It is eleven o'clock now. The inquest is going to be tomorrow. Mr.

Walsh has been here. He thinks you won't have to come to the inquest. Please don't come unless you have to. I'd rather you didn't."

He could not make out if she had signed herself "Yours Olga" or "Your Olga." The word "inquest" was misspelt.

Lawrance took the letter in his hand, crumpled it close and held it. He opened his waistcoat and his shirt, pressed the letter to his bare breast, kept it there. He thought himself a weak fool, a sentimental ass, but the letter stayed. He had no appetite, yet he did not want not to eat. Well, he was going to Switzerland, to St. Franz. He repeated to himself: "I am going to St. Franz." He thought of what had to be done. He would go to the Foreign Office, and get two application forms for passports. They had put up a large wooden structure for the business of issuing passports; he remembered having seen it. Better to start at once. He finished his breakfast hurriedly.

When he was outside the front door it occurred to him that the Passport place would most likely not be open so early. He would have to go at midday. Now he would be too early at the Office. He would take a bus the whole way, then he would walk about.

In the Strand a red arrow pointing to a recruiting office caught his eye. "Perhaps they'd take me," he thought. Then he could stay, he would not go to Switzerland, he would have to be in England for training for some time, it would be his duty to be in the same country with Olga. He got down from the bus. People said the doctors weren't too particular nowadays. Certainly he didn't feel that there was anything the matter with his heart. It might have got better.

He hadn't long to wait. It was one of the seasons when recruiting was slack, a little while before the trial of the Derby Scheme. As Lawrance stripped, Olga's letter fell to the floor, and one of the doctors, passing through, smiled. This doctor was a solid agreeable-looking man of middle age and middle height, blandly brisk. . . . "Hey?" he said suddenly, after a minute of examination. "Hey? what's this?" He was silent, listening, tapping. Then: "Won't do, I'm afraid. Aortic. You're no good to us. Put your clothes on. Sorry."

"You're sure?" asked Lawrance vaguely. It seemed to have happened too quickly.

"What's the use? You'd never stand the life. You wouldn't stand the training." He said something rapidly and inaudibly to the other doctor, who nodded. "Don't be alarmed. You're all right, but you've got to take care of yourself. You couldn't do that in France. Out of the question. You've a doctor of your own, haven't you?"

"Yes—but I thought— You really don't think any one would—?"

"Not while he retained his senses.— Well, you've done the right thing. But if we passed you you'd only be filling a bed that's meant for a better man. Better man physically, I mean. Wouldn't do at all. Well, good-bye. Tell her you're no good to us." He smiled again. "Tell her you've tried. Don't go running upstairs too hard." He sat down and began to write.

"Go and put your clothes on," said the other doctor, rather severely, as though Lawrance were doing something indecent, standing there.

Lawrance dressed and walked on to the Office. So it

was to be Switzerland for him. Perhaps, though, Letty would not come. He did not know what he hoped. The medical examination had taken the wind out of his sails, given him a collapsed helpless feeling. It was useless, then, to try to strike out.— That rifle that had been leaning against the wall, was it loaded? he wondered vaguely. That young soldier who had measured and weighed him was a particularly fine-looking man— Passing one of Cook's offices he remembered that application forms for passports could be obtained there. He went in and got two of them.

Britton was in the Office when he arrived; no one else, though at first the presence of the large grey felt hat had led him to expect to find Mr. Inge. Then he remembered. The associations of that hat—the hotel near Euston—Tofton's corpse—Olga—how grotesque! He stood looking at it, he even touched it.

"Don't want to borrow it again, sir, do you?" Britton asked grinning. "Mr. Crockerton Deavitt's been round already," he added. "He said he'd come back in thirty-five minutes."

"All right. Let's have a look at the letters."

Before Lawrance had finished looking through and sorting the correspondence a telegram was brought to him. "From Olga" was his first thought, he was hit emotionally below the belt, in the pit of his fluttering stomach. But the telegram was from Letty.— "How exciting of course I'll come Wednesday noon train Letitia."— Yes, she would be excited, and happily. "Letitia" was the name between them when any pleasant stir was in the air. "Now then, Letitia, hurry up or you'll be late!" How often he had said that! Especially when she had been a little girl, and the name for

her had seemed more comically incongruous. Lawrance recalled his homecomings from Oxford, when his pretty little sister used to run out to meet him, in her short skirts and blue jersey. "Hulloa, dear little Letitia!" How bright her eyes had been, how active and *well* she was then! She would be well again. It was worth going to Switzerland. He felt ashamed of himself for having wanted to get out of going. It was sensible of Letty to have thought of telegraphing to the Office. . . . He was very fond of her. . . . He could see her dear brown eyes, her affectionate mouth. . . . A good thing he had got those application forms. He resolved to send one to his sister at once: she could fill it in and get it endorsed by the clergyman at Malstowe, or by Doctor Peachey. He took a long office envelope, addressed it to her, and wrote a few lines: "Very glad indeed you are coming"—then he told her what to do with the form: she must hunt out a small photograph—and so on.

As he was signing his name, there came a short sharp tap-tap on the door, and the sideways face of Mr. Crockerton Deavitt peered into the room, giving the impression that it was detached from his body.

"'Morning," he said. "Lovely morning 'smorning. Best morning of all the mornings we've had for several mornings. Hulloa, what's that? Passport application forms? Going abroad?"

"Yes. Switzerland."

"Oh, you har, har yer?" Deavitt sat down by his side. "Don't mind my stopping for half a minute, do you? One or two things I want to get off my chest. I'm off to the country this morning, so thought I'd better take the tuniopportunity. Old R. D. W. turned up

trumps." He lowered his voice. "Got on the job at once. Inquest to-day. They won't want you or me. Just as well. R. D. W.'s bill won't be anything out of the way. Quite worth it, you know, from our point of view. He knows the ropes. Hope it'll be all right for the Glasden Road crowd. Sure to be, I think. R. D. W. was a bit non-committal—cautious old bird—but from what he said I fancy there'll be no *serious* trouble. Medical evidence will count for a lot, you know."

Lawrance nodded. He wanted Deavitt to see that he understood.

"So you're off to Switzerland? Be away long?"

"Probably two or three months. I'm taking my sister. It depends on how she gets on. She's ill, you know."

"Oh, I see. When do you start?"

"She's coming up Wednesday."

"She's not in town, then?" Deavitt questioned rather sharply.

"No, she and my mother live down at Malstowe."

"Oh—I thought—Burphie seemed to think your sister lived in London?"

Lawrance blushed, remembering. That lie about Olga being his sister, how it was always coming back at him! There was something, it seemed, in what he had been told in his childhood—"What a tangled web we weave," and the rest.

"Oh, no," he replied, "in Malstowe. Did you get that paymaster job?" he added quickly.

"Yes; panned out all right. The Colonel was in beautiful working order. 'B.W.O.' as they say in the Church. Not half a bad screw, either. I shall be keeping up two homes and going racing. I go to Woolwich

later in the week. Then to Calais or the Base after a bit. Old Israfel tells me I'm perfectly safe from bombs or shells. You better look me up on your way back from Switzerland. Shan't see you again, I suppose. You haven't your Swiss address, have you?"

"No. Letters to the Office will be forwarded. Let me know what I owe for R. D. Walsh, won't you?"

"All right. I'll send you the bill for your whack."

As he was shaking hands and saying "Ta-ta" Lord Burpham came in. Seeing his cousin, Deavitt whipped out his handkerchief and hung it over his own face.

"Haven't you heard?" He turned to Lawrance and whispered hoarsely. "We don't speak since he started playing the oboe." With his handkerchief veil he stood stiffly pressed close to the wall, with his hands by his sides.

"Well, Crockerton," Lord Burpham affably addressed him.

"Discovered! ha!" ejaculated the other, snatching the handkerchief from his face. "If I am discovered, I am lo-host! Penetrated me disguise with his eagle eye! Who'd have thought it?"

"Playing the clown as usual, eh?"

"No, Georgie, it's my Monday off. I say, Master Horace has got me that paymastership. What d'you think of that?"

"You don't deserve it. I wish I'd told him so."

"I got in first, though, didn't I, cockie? All because you *won't* get up early in the morning."

"Well, Mr. Lawrance." Lord Burpham turned to him. "Mr. Ralston in yet?"

"No. Mr. Inge hasn't come, either."

"I particularly wish to see Mr. Ralston."

"Can't be done, I'm afraid," Deavitt whipped in. "Quite imposs. His hours are from twelve to two, with an hour and a quarter off for lunch. Didn't you know? And our young friend here's going off to Switzerland. Don't think we ought to allow it, do you?"

"Switzerland? H'm?" Burpham looked interrogatively.

"Yes, my sister's ill. I've got to take her out and look after her."

"Dear, dear. I'm sorry to hear that. No idea she was seriously ill. Very sorry."

"I was going to ask if you'd mind signing this application form." Lawrance, embarrassed, spoke to divert his interlocutor.

"Certainly, certainly." Burpham took the form. "Let's see. 'Fit and proper person to receive a passport'— But I'm not a banker or a doctor or a clergyman. Ah, yes,—magistrate—I see. Certainly. 'Miss Olga Lawrance.' I'm sure I wish her the very best of luck—speedy recovery—I think the name was 'Olga'?"

"Oh, this is a Form for *me*." Lawrance blushed deeply; he had seen Deavitt's wink at him. Of course Deavitt would find out; he had known he would, all along. "I've sent my sister's on to her."

"All right, then." Burpham looked a shade put out and a shade puzzled. He moved over to a table, with the paper in his hand.

"I twig," Deavitt whispered. "The Germans have taken Peckham Rye," he added loudly. "Oh, yes, indeed, auntie. And now they've got it they say they don't want it. But Kitchener told 'em they'd got to keep it.— Good gag, eh? Well, I'm off. Have to get

down to Weston. Three of my families down there. Bye-bye!" He made his usual despatch.

Lord Burpham made a good deal of the application form. "This won't go *abroad*, will it?" he said, a little apprehensively, and then: "But look here, it seems to me you ought to put in all these answers first.— Don't forget—ah—you must sign your name in full. I'll wait till you've done. Be careful about it. We want to have everything in order.— Where exactly are you going in Switzerland?" He spoke with an official importance.

"St. Franz." Lawrance took the paper, and began to fill it in.

"St. Franz! Well—well." Lord Burpham sat down again and stared meditatively at the wall. He crossed his discreet legs, and his steady blue eyes remained fixed for a minute or two, as Lawrance went on filling up the Form. "Ah—yes," he said at length. "My sister-in-law is out there—curious thing—with her mother. I'll give you a letter, if you like."

"Thanks very much." Lawrance looked up. He was pleased. He had noticed that Lord Burpham had been distinctly friendlier ever since that meeting with Olga at the theatre. Of course he thought that the letter of introduction was to include her. That was why. . . . Shame clouded the young man's pleasure. He blushed again.

"My sister-in-law is Lady Blanche Voltalin," Burpham went on, with a dry abstracted air. "Trouble with her throat; soon after my poor brother's death. But she's much better, much better. I heard from Lady Petistree—her mother—the other day. They're both

very tired of being out in that place; it's a dull hole, I'm afraid. You'll cheer one another up. I'll post you the letter to-night— Not at all. Very glad. You'll have to get a *Visa* at the French Consulate, of course.— You know that? Great nuisance it is, you have to wait for hours, standing up. But perhaps Cook's can manage that for you— Dear me, I do wish Ralston would hurry.— What do you think of my cousin Crockerton? Never knew any one so fond of playing the fool. He's a little mad, really. Can be very annoying. Not a bad sort, though, really—at bottom. No. And understands architecture. . . ."

Lawrance, as he finished filling in the form, could not resist the conviction that Lord Burpham was thinking all the time about Olga. It was quite unlike him to be talkative in this way: he seemed to be covering a pre-occupation. Lawrance felt oddly triumphant, triumphant in his own person. He got up and handed over the Form. Lord Burpham took out his glasses, and read it over with a deliberate magisterial air.

"All right," he said. "That's all right. I'll sign."

Further colloquy followed. Burpham reminded the young man that he must also have his photograph endorsed "by me, as guarantor"; told him that he could get it taken at a moment's notice at a place in the Strand, near the Foreign Office. "They make a speciality, a speciality." Lawrance had better post it to him, to Queen Street, for endorsement as soon as possible. The matter was very seriously taken. Mr. Ralston's arrival precipitated its conclusion, to the relief of Lawrance who was beginning to get nervous. Mr. Ralston did not take kindly at all to the prospect of Lawrance's departure.

“You must talk to Mr. Inge,” he said severely, two or three times: “You must talk to Mr. Inge.” He then withdrew with Lord Burpham to his private room.

Lawrance found that he was undisturbed. Inge would splutter, he knew, but it couldn’t be helped. How wonderful Olga was, how intensely to be desired! Lord Burpham’s concealed but motive admiration thrillingly heightened his consciousness of how wonderful and how desirable she was. He forgot Letty.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE aloofness that came upon the young man gave him a peculiar sense of power. Everything was insignificant, and he, with the strength and the reality of his passion for Olga, could dominate it all. The machinery of his will moved with perfect ease and certainty, in an inevitable drive. It took in the remonstrances of Mr. Inge and smoothly reduced them to an unavailing pulp. "Well," Inge had said at last, "I suppose it's necessary. You certainly seem to have made up your mind." Lawrance was, at every point, enabled. His conversation with Inge, his arrangements for carrying on some of his work by post, his getting his photograph taken at the Strand shop, the couple of reviews that he wrote—all were immaterial except in so far as they had to be done with before he could go on to Olga. The prospect of St. Franz, though it was none the less sure, had faded: his girl shut out the future. He would see her that evening, and to-morrow: he was centred there.

Olga opened the door for him. He held her. She said nothing, she looked tired, but she welcomed him with bright eyes that exalted him to an edge tremulous but secure. He could not realize, though, that she kissed him. But he felt that her look banished others from them, he felt that everything was understood in a new freedom. He had the conviction—how beautifully lit-

teral a one it was!—that he had never been so happy. The words of a text came to him with startling interpretation: “I live, and yet not I, but—Olga liveth in me.” “Olga in me!” Yes, it was so, it was in perfect truth. “She is come that you may have life, and that you may have it more abundantly.” This was no profanity; profanity was not even suspected.

“My girl!” he whispered at last.

“Then it will be all right now, won’t it?” she said, a little sadly.

They stood apart, and he met the gaze of her washed green eyes that gave him love, though they were sure of nothing. He, for his part, was sure then that he must take and keep her. Her eyes dropped and were darkened by her lashes. Little Marjorie came out suddenly from the dining-room.

“Uncle Lorrie!” she cried, too much excited to think of kissing him. “It’s all over! What do you think those men said it was? ‘Wil-ful murder!’”

“What!”

“Yes, they did! Oo-er! I s’pose it must be true, because they said so.”

“Against some person or persons unknown,” Olga hurriedly put in.

“It *was* exciting,” Marjorie went on eagerly, “it was like a story. They asked us all a lot of questions. There was a man who called me ‘my dear.’ I told him I wasn’t his dear. Cheek! They laughed, and the man who was put up at a desk said they weren’t to. He said: ‘I shall clear the Court.’” She frowned and deepened her voice. “He was very cross, and said I mustn’t say anything, but answer the questions.” She continued to chatter as they went into the dining room

and Lawrance greeted Mr. Flynn who was there alone. "Uncle Lance said that he and Uncle Tofty had had words because Uncle Tofty had used his fountain-pen and would jab the point when he wrote. Uncle Lance gets angry when other people use his fountain-pen. It's the only thing that makes him angry. He said—"

"Well." Lawrance addressed the Mariner under Marjorie's flow. "So it's all over."

"Yes, we're through with it. Whole damned business. Lord help us, what a fuss about nothing! Why, they don't make any account of things of that sort, out in British East. Poor Patsey, she's upset, though. And no wonder. You'd have knocked that fellow down, Lorrie, if you'd been there. Much as I could do to keep myself under. She might have been on the streets, the way he talked to her! Poor Patsey! Damned swine!" Lawrance noted the Mariner's air of bravado. He didn't like it. It was a deformity. The old man was struggling uneasily—unnaturally. He was cruelly wrought. "Damned swine!" he repeated.

"I saw him!" Lawrance's attention returned to Marjorie. "I've never seen any one dead before. He didn't look like a real person. I don't like dead people, do you, Uncle Lorrie?— Mother's been up in her room ever since we came back. I wish she'd come down. She's always upstairs now. And Doris stayed in the train; she went right on, when we all got out. I s'pose she's gone to the theatre, though that isn't till evening, is it? I'm going to sell programmes, too, when I get older. I'm going to begin when I'm fourteen. Our house smelt of stale milk yesterday—"

"Sit down, my boy. Why are we all standing up? My legs ache, and I want a drink. Marjie, get the

whiskey. Patsey—poor old darling—she doesn't feel well. And Ewing—do you know, Lorrie, it's a damned shame, it's a damned outrage, they've given him the sack at his Bank. What's he going to do? He asks leave off for the inquest, they give him his pay, and tell him they don't want him back. He's well over forty. Out now looking for a job. What's his chance? You know. He's got no chance. Of course we'll keep him here, of course we will—poor fellow, why he's smashed, ain't he? No two ways of looking at it—smashed."

"I don't know about that. It isn't so difficult now for a man over military age. . . . I might be able to do something. But you're right, it's outrageous. People are curs." Lawrance tried to feel indignant, but he couldn't. Ewing's misfortune did not seem to matter.

"The fuss they make about a thing like this!" The Mariner took a long gulp of his whiskey. "I tell you, Lorrie, we haven't got the right hang of things, we don't see things right. Civilization. . . . Huh! Life isn't so important as all that. Cowardice at the bottom of it—all this precious worry about who gets killed and who doesn't. The war ought to give us a good lesson—lesson we need. Why, when I was out in British East. . . . Wish I could pack those long-faced jurymen out there. Stuffed up with damn nonsense about the sanctity of human life and all the rest of it. They've been too blasted safe—too blasted safe from the cradle on, that's what's the trouble with them. In British East, in my time, if a man died, he died, and there was an end of it. Same way in Colorado, in the old days. Men were better then, too, knew how to live, knew how much life was worth, knew how much death was worth. Right proportion. Gosh! If a nigger's dying in British

East the others give him to the hyenas or burn him—make a clean job of it—no corpses. Good instinct. That fellow Tofton, he was dying—rotten through and through, I told you. Well, it was a clean job for him—whoever did it. Probably did it himself—” He trailed off on an uncertain note.

“I’m sorry about the verdict,” said Lawrance in a low voice.

“Oh, what’s it matter? ‘Person or persons unknown.’ Ought to have said ‘philanthropist.’ Ha! ha!” He drank again, finishing his tumbler. His eyes were rather rheumy. “‘By some philanthropist or philanthropists unknown.’” He laughed loudly and blew his nose. “That lawyer you sent us is all right. Good idea. Not his fault they didn’t bring it in *felo de se*.”

“We shan’t get any supper!” Marjorie, who had slipped out of the room, appeared again. “Mother won’t come down. Olga, do stop reading! I’m hungry.”

“Don’t let’s trouble about cooking.” Lawrance put his hand in his pocket. “Go out and get a tongue or something, Marjorie. That’ll be all right, won’t it?”

“I don’t believe we’ve any butter.” The child looked grave.

“Well, get anything you haven’t got.” He gave her five shillings with a sense of pleasure in paying for what Olga was to eat.

“Don’t like this briar!” Mr. Flynn suddenly exclaimed. “D’you know I broke my meerschaum? Had it for years. That’s a stroke of real bad luck. Dear old meerschaum gone. Dropped and smashed to bits—Time for another drink. You don’t drink to-night, Lorrie, you’re sipping it. I never drink when I’m alone.

Never.” He was so emphatic that Lawrance suspected him. “You ought to have heard old Ewing at the show this morning. Good as a play. Wasn’t it, Olga?”

The girl started, and looked up from her book. “It was a horrid room,” she said. “I hated that ugly room.”

Mr. Flynn laughed and stretched his long legs out over the hearthrug. “Old Ewing—kept asking him about the night before. Very curious about that. Wanted to find out what sort of a row there’d been. Ewing says, oh, yes, there’d been a row. ‘About what?’ ‘About my fountain-pen,’ he says—very indignant. ‘What about your fountain-pen?’ ‘He would keep using it—without my leave. He writes thick,’ says Ewing, ‘and I write fine. He jabs the nib and spoils it.’ And there was Tofton stiff on his back in the next room—and—” The Mariner drew his hand across his throat and gave a hoarse clicking sound. “‘I can’t write with it when he’s been at it,’ says Ewing, ‘and yesterday he’d crossed the nib.’ Told them they’d had words—*words!*” Mr. Flynn leaned further back and laughed. “Old Ewing was restive, I can tell you. ‘He did it on purpose!’ Coroner thought he was touched. ‘Well, he won’t do it again, Mr. Ewing,’ he said. ‘He’d better not,’ says Ewing. ‘Better not!’ What d’you think of that?”

“I suppose it all came out about the row at tea?”

“In a sort of way. Not so important as the fountain-pen, though— The jury were fools. They had the medical evidence—you know. They had the motive all right. What more did they want?—Doris wasn’t brought in.” He turned and stared into the fire. “No, not at all. Much better. She gave evidence, of course.

Nothing important— I wish Patsey would come. You know, Lorrie, I never see her now—upon my soul and honour, never seem to see her. Of course she's upset. Poor old dear—poor old—" He drank again.

"I hope she'll see me to-night." Lawrance continued to give his whiskey occasional casual sips. He did not feel like drinking.

"Wish you could stay the night with us, old boy."

"Well, I can. I should like to." Lawrance was conscious of boldness, without knowing why. Olga put down her book.

"That's good: that's very good."

"My wife is away, you see."

"Ha. Yes. We've a spare room now.— You don't mind, do you? No reason to mind, is there? Not in the least—not for a man of sense."

Lawrance hesitated for a moment. It certainly was soon. Then: "Oh, of course I don't mind," he said. The reflection came: "What would Mary think?" but again he felt bold. He ejected considerations of Mary. But he could not look at Olga, though he wanted to. "May I stay with you two nights?" he asked suddenly, after a pause.

"Stay all the nights you want. More the better."

"Ah, but I'm leaving London!" Lawrance saw that Olga started; he could not see her face.

"What! Not for long, though, are you?"

"Perhaps for some months. I'm going to Switzerland with my sister." He spoke rapidly. "She's ill, she must go. There's no one else to take her. My mother's an invalid."

There was silence. The old man moved his bearded chin up and down, he smacked his lips, then spat in the

dying fire. "Bad news for us," he said at last. "We were counting on you, Lorrie. You understand. We've no friends—except Ewing."

Lawrance, turning to Olga, on resolve, caught the girl's stricken look. Her face seemed laid bare, it was a woman's face. She got up, drawing her breath, and left them.

"You've upset her, Lorrie. You'll be upsetting us all."

"I'm awfully sorry—"

"The girl's fond of you. She's yours. She's not one of these English girls. She's worth more— You know, Lorrie—she means more. She's deeper. Can't express it, but you know. These last few weeks, I've been sure. She's the best of the three—always will be. I've always cared most for her. Haven't you?"

"Yes. I love her."

"What, an' your going away?"

"I must. Why, what's the use? You know I'm married. From the practical point of view—morality apart—"

"You could make her happy, all the same—"

Lawrance shook his head.

"Stuff and nonsense!" The Mariner was violent. "What's it all about? All this cant people talk. We're here for fifty or sixty years—beggarly snatch—and we go picking our way between the joins of the paving-stones under our feet, all the time,—like a lot of damn degenerate paranoiacs! We ought to walk with a free stride! What do those dividing-lines mean?" He raised his voice, the veins stood blue on his high flushed forehead. "Nothing at all—accidents—arbitrary— Olga's yours: it doesn't happen often,—not

like that,—you're lucky, both of you,—take her. Take one another. Why, Lord have mercy, are you running away from the girl? Best thing for her; best thing for you both— Stuff and nonsense!"

"It's all very well." Lawrance was bewildered. "You wouldn't say that if you were her real father."

"And isn't she Patsey's daughter? And don't we know you? Aren't we your friends? I talk like this, because I see straight. It's my talking that hits you. There are plenty of others who might think it, and keep it to themselves. Haven't the courage. I look things in the face."

"I don't believe Patsey would agree with you!"

The Mariner's fixed gaze at him shook slightly: his old eyes were for a moment furtive. "Didn't she let the girl go with you that night?" he asked defiantly.

"You know why. That was different. She didn't want to, either. Any one could see— And Olga was safe," he added proudly. "Patsey knew she would be."

"Oh, she was *safe*! I knew that as soon as she came back."

"Didn't you know it before?"

"Patsey didn't," he evaded. "Do you think a mother ever knows that?— But Patsey feels as I do. She wouldn't say so, but she does,—in her heart. Why, she must. Good Lord!" His hands trembled: he was excited.

"You're wrong!" Lawrance was passionately in arms against this assault upon the value of his sacrifice. "We aren't in the kind of world you've got in your mind—"

"If we're not strong enough to make our own world we ought to be kicked! And we get kicked, too! Look

here—keep their law, do the right thing, as they call it. What's your gain, eh? It's the anarchist that scores here. I suppose you think good deeds—huh! 'good'!—bring good fruit. It's not how things are. You think you're to get grapes and your lip's cut with a crop of thorns; think you've got figs, and they're thistles in your beard. I've lived. I know. I've given you your chance to call me a miserable old pandar,—not a chance I'd give to another man in the world: I know better than that. Take it, if you like. But you'll learn that what looks like a bad man can do good things,—what looks like evil gives good growth,—and the other way round. All the time! Wedge yourself up in their blessed code, you're bound hand and foot! Good and evil! Huh! Keep your eyes open!"

As the old man spoke, Lawrance's resolution hardened in its mould. The conviction, strangely ultimate, that he himself could never be so loosed and so scattered, that in such a dissolution of the strands that bound but held him he would perish, took its place.

"Of course I don't think you're a—a pandar. I know you're honest, but I'm sure you're wrong. I can't marry Olga. I'm a husband; it won't be long before I'm a father. Think of the position for her. It's common-sense. And there is something in the rules people have made. Anyhow, there'd come to be something simply because the rules are there and have been working for ages. That would be enough of itself. Say I take Olga. I shut everything else out from her." He stopped, and then, with his heart beating vehemently and his eyes blurred and hot, added: "Suppose we have a child."

"You needn't. You aren't an infant, Lorrie, are you? And things like that—simply depends on how much

money you've got. A detail. Later on—perhaps. Well, and do you think we wouldn't like a son of yours in our family?"

"You must see that it wouldn't mean happiness for Olga, in the end?"

"Question of degree. Not many of us get happiness,—not steady and unmixed. Your leaving Olga won't make her happy. Suppose you'd like her to have somebody else?"

"She won't! I'm not giving her up!"

"What the devil do you mean?"

"Of course I'm not. How could I? Oh, you don't understand at all!"

"No, I don't. That's right. I don't. There's nothing *to* be understood, God help us! You won't take her and you won't leave her; you want what can't work—"

"Oh, you don't know what may happen!"

Lawrance suffered. He felt as though the old man were taking him by the head, twisting it round, forcing him to a view that he hated and denied, with a denial stultified by his hatred.

"What are you going to do then? What's your plan?"

"You've no right to question me! I haven't got it worked out like a proposition of Euclid. Olga's very young. We can take things as they come to us. There may be some way—later. I can't give her up: I won't give her up!"

"You're going off to Switzerland. You better take care. Not a wise move. You'll lose her. I know the girl,—know her well, too. Didn't you see her face when you said you were going? She's not a child. She's older than girls of twenty. I don't know what she'll do,

but it won't please you, and the pity of it is it won't please her.— When you come back, you'll be just as much married as you ever were, won't you? You're too much afraid, Lorrie, that's the trouble. You're going to Switzerland because you want to put off. Don't tell me that any young fellow will sacrifice himself and his girl to his sister. Not in human nature. For the matter of that, you could perfectly well take your sister out, settle her in, and leave her there. It's only a chance that that isn't what you've *got* to do. You're doing the wrong thing. You'll be sorry for it.— You wouldn't do it if you faced probabilities. What's the good of fooling yourself with the off-chance of this or that? Moonshine! A good General doesn't reckon on off-chances—”

“He does, if that's all he has to reckon on.” Lawrance was bitter and dogged. “I've a reason. I can't put Olga on a lower level than my wife. I can't—I don't choose to—degrade her like that. Don't you see”—he tried to warm up convincingly—“that it's monstrous for the one I love to be made inferior—? Why—”

He had fallen back heavily on this idea, which had, since the day before, been working its growth all the more obstinately in his mind because that growth was adventitious and forced.

The old man raised his grey eyebrows and stared. “Superstition,” he said. “And you know it as well as I do.”

Lawrance, feeling that he could not argue, grew angry, and still more tenacious of the “reason” that he had foisted on himself. It was a glove for the hand of the

inhibition that was stronger than his desire—of a more constant and inherent strength.

“It’s the way I feel,” he heavily asserted: to which declaration of ethical sentiment the Mariner’s only reply was a long, slow, drink.

They were silent till Marjorie came in to lay the cloth for supper.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THERE were only four of them at the meal. Mrs. Flynn stayed upstairs: and she was not again mentioned, except by Marjorie, whose rather woful little chatter was baulked by the silence of her three companions. Ewing did not return, nor did Doris: once Lawrance asked where she was, and Olga said: "She's ill; she's gone to the doctor." Olga's eyes were veiled as she spoke; her tone was indifferent, and diminished as it were by distance.

Lawrance, indeed, felt himself surrounded by distances. He had anticipated nothing of this: he had reached out to a nearness to these friends, to a nearness to Olga. He had thought that he would set a seal on the formless future. But Olga hardly seemed to be there: as the meal went on he ceased to give her his looks; he found himself viewing her in the mirror of past time. All that sense of power that he had had was melted: the world apart from Olga was just as insignificant, but its insignificance had no call on any dominating force from him. Was it because of what the Mariner had said, was it because—?

Suddenly Marjorie cried: "I've made your bed in Uncle Tofty's room; I got out the clean sheets!"

"All right, Marjie. Thanks."

"Yes, it's at the top of the stairs, next to Olga's. Doris and I sleep at the end of the passage. I'll come in and wake you in the morning. It's fun, your sleeping here, isn't it?"

Lawrance was answering, but stopped, distracted, as he saw that Olga trembled.

"I'm going to bed d'rec'ly after supper," Marjorie went on. "I'm tired. Olga, aren't you tired? Don't let's wash up tonight. I shan't have to go to school tomorrow morning, shall I? Have you seen Mr. Deavitt? When is he coming again?"

Lawrance gave her news of Mr. Deavitt.

The Mariner hardly uttered a word, and, after supper, when Olga and Marjorie had left them, he was no less silent. He kept doing innumerable little things: he cleaned his pipe with a feather, he scraped the bowl, he filled his pouch, and his matchbox, he walked round in search of his slippers: he was earnest with these trifling activities. He kept putting his head to one side, displaying his brown crinkled neck, he laid his forefinger meditatively to the side of his long well modelled nose. He drank no more, nor did Lawrance. Lawrance grew nervous with him, wanted to go away. He could not keep on in this wrong current.

"I think I'll go to bed." He got up. "It's early, I know, but—" He held out his hand, which the Mariner took, without looking at him. They wished one another goodnight.

In the deceased Claude Tofton's room Lawrance sat still for a long while. He had recoiled, on his entrance, from the look of the bed, and he sat with his back to it. The clean white linen seemed funereal. He shrank, too, from the very personal reminder given him by the collection of Tofton's ties, hanging with uneven ends on a peg. What were they going to do with the man's things? There was a brown leather collar-box on the dressing-table. On a long nail by the door was hang-

ing a washbag that bulged,—full, no doubt, of Tofton's last week's dirty linen that would normally have gone to the wash that morning. Who would attend to all these details? Those soiled clothes—with their recent contact? Civilization certainly made things uglier: now a sudden death among savages. . . . Lawrance let his thoughts run in and out: he sat with his eyes fixed on the ground. In that bed to-night he would be the supplanter of a corpse— A bathmat had been put just in front of the dressing-table. Everything, he had noticed, was very neat. They had cleared things away: why should they have left just the ties, the collar-box, and the washbag? Lawrance was glad he had not seen Tofton. . . .

He reflected on the Mariner's point of view, beginning with an embrace, in forced urgency, of the conviction that the old man was utterly wrong. If, agreeing with him, he could act as though he were right, he would shatter himself altogether. It was his unrealized egoism that kept him on the side of virtue. The one sacrifice that was not possible to Lawrance was the sacrifice of his individual inelasticity. Then the fact of his having, with such tremendous completeness, his chance, brought into fierce action all his instinct for refusal and restraint. In his conscious mind he did nothing but repeat his old "tags": "It would be the wrong thing": "I won't degrade her": "She is too young": "Every decent man would say I was right." He suffered, and was proud of his suffering with almost the pride of a coxcomb, though he was too much of a "gentleman" to allow himself to appear before his mind's mirror as "a fine fellow." All his aim was towards humility.

Growing cramped on his little cane-bottomed chair, he got up and found himself looking at the backs of some dozen of books that were tidily arranged on a small shelf. No doubt they belonged—had belonged—to Claude Tofton. There were no romances of Paul de Kock: these were innocent works,—detective stories, humorous stories— Lawrance took down “Three Men in a Boat.” Yes, it was Tofton’s: “C. Tofton, Cliftonville, August, 1901” was written on the flyleaf in a bold broad hand, with flourishes and a thick line underneath. No wonder Ewing’s fountain-pen suffered.— He turned the pages, and it occurred to him that the “George” of Mr. Jerome’s story rather resembled Tofton in his personal appearance, and that he was of just the same social class. You could always tell if a man was not a gentleman by the way he wore his flannels. That way of wearing them, either unusedly, without ease, or with a bravado of leisure.— Tofton, in flannels, would have looked like this “George.” He would have called them “whites.” Was it worth so much, though, to be a gentleman? If he, Lawrance, had not been a gentleman, he would not have married a lady. He wished that he had married, not just a little beneath him, as he had done, but very flagrantly beneath him. It would have been better, it would have been different. . . . Olga was not of any class.

Lawrance went back to his chair with the book. He had not read it since he was thirteen,—sixteen years ago. For that reason he liked the idea of reading it again.

In half-an-hour or so he heard Olga’s step on the staircase, and then her opening of the door of the room next to his. The old man had come up some time before, so

had Marjorie. Lawrance strove to continue to read. He gave no play to himself.

It was without any patent volition that he left his room and tapped on the girl's door. She did not answer, and he went in.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "you do look ill."

She was sitting at a little desk, looking over some letters. She wore a white dressing-gown of fine wool, with silk braidings and a silk cord. Her hair was loose and hid her cheeks. The dressing-gown reached nearly to her ankles, which were bare; her feet were in old slippers with a ragged fur lining. The bracelet he had given her on that birthday was on her wrist, hanging rather loosely. How slender her wrist was! So slender that he felt a kind of fear. He stood, with the door ajar, looking at her.

"I never said goodnight to you," he declared in a hot dry tone of assertion, as though he were arguing a point.

"I expect you were tired. I'm tired—awfully."

"That's a nice dressing-gown." His hand shut the door.

"He gave it to me."

"Who?"

Olga pointed her thumb towards Tofton's room. "I didn't think it mattered," she said in an even voice, "if he wanted to."

"Oh,—well; I suppose not,—so long as—"

"I've been wondering if these things people make such a lot about do matter very much after all."

"Your father's said anything? He's wrong, Olga. Don't you believe—"

"No, he didn't. I've been saying things to myself—"

I'm not happy at all. Everything seems to have—to have gone away. You're going away!" She stood before him, with her rich young head drooped and her child's figure a little swaying. "I wish you hadn't kissed me at all—ever! I wish you hadn't taken me away that time—I wish I'd stayed! It wouldn't have mattered. The things that do happen are the worst, not the things we're afraid will happen. If we stop what's coming, it's so much the worse— After this, I'm going to take everything that comes—everything. The other way's wrong! Oh!" She put her hand to her lips which were trembling under her trembling words. She turned from him to the window, and leaned against it, with one arm raised.

Lawrance cleared his throat with a queer pedantic sound. "Can't you wait for me?" His eyes were fixed upon the white curve of her wrist and the frail beginning lines of her arm shown by the dropping of her sleeve. "I'm coming back!"

She didn't answer: she leaned her head a little further forward. Her neck showed, defenceless, between the falls of her hair. The young man went to her and took her quickly in his arms.

"You must believe in me," he whispered. "I shall always love you. I shall never give you up!"

To his amazement, she laughed.

"Olga!" he added, rather pompously. "You *don't* believe me, then?"

"It doesn't matter, does it,—do you think?—what we *say*?"

She was sitting on his knees now, on her bed, one of her slippered feet toying with the other. She sat there, as though she had been ten years old,—with an attentive-

ness so slight that it was almost listless. It seemed that she was tired, but not quite too tired to listen to a story.

Lawrance did not know what to do. His attention began to be distracted, painfully, by her left slipper, which had loosened and was showing her smooth heel. He thought of the marble of those bridges at Venice, marble that was warm,—worn from the chill of its first surface. It would be terrible, he thought gravely, if the slipper should come off. How far could his own endurance be trusted? Far it must go.

“It’s not what we say.” He spoke at last. “It’s what we mean. I want to tell you what I mean.”

“But I know you’re going away.”

“But if I’m fond of you still—if you—”

“I wouldn’t go away. It doesn’t—come even. It isn’t fair. Oh, I don’t want to want you! And I shall do—I shall do whatever *happens*. I don’t belong to you!” She gave her foot a little jerk, so that the slipper at last fell off: she began rubbing her toes against the other slipper’s edge of fur.

Lawrance looked away, but the pressure of his arms on her tightened. He clung to the sense that, for all that she said, she was belonging to him more than ever before, that he lived in her more surely. “I live, and yet not I—” He had never felt that before to-day, not in his whole life. . . . When he was nineteen there had been a phase of conversion to ritualistic Anglicanism; he remembered that now. Then there had been some hint of this. He had gone to Confession: then, as now, he had been purged of himself. Lawrance made the call, in full, upon his idealism, and Olga, by her defencelessness, her fatigue, her unhappiness, unwittingly gave him aid.

“You won’t do that,” he told her, feeling that he must

speak to be safe, though his words seemed to try to artificialize his emotions. "Can't we trust each other? It's not brave to take things as they come, it's not intelligent,—is it? And it doesn't work out right, either. Think of poor Doris!"

"I'm not Doris. And I'd just as soon be Doris, anyhow."

She put up her bare foot, resting it upon her knee. Lawrance felt himself rolled up like a wave to her, and then rolled back,—again and again. He watched, absorbed: he wondered what would happen. It was like the first tentative stage of the operation of an anæsthetic. He began to feel calm, resigned, irresponsible.

"You know—" Olga said slowly, "I told you; I'm not afraid of you. I thought I would be afraid, I thought I'd be afraid and happy,—excitingly and fearfully and terribly happy. You made me think that, because I'd never thought it before. It was after that time we were in the cab, after the theatre. And much more later. It grew; it was funny, how it grew, quite suddenly, one time and another. I knew you couldn't be happy in that way, unless you were afraid— I must be afraid, I must be!— You showed me,—but I knew it, really, by myself, afterwards. When you were with me that morning in that hotel, I was sure. It had been coming all that time. A sort of fear and a sort of joy: but I don't have either!"

"It's I who am afraid of you—"

She turned and looked at him, troubled; with her frown. "If any one else comes," she said painfully, "it won't be the same; it won't be what I thought. But it will be, in a way. Ah,—I thought it would be like I said, only you and me and no one else—" She broke

off, and then, with a bitter and ashamed release of passion: "It's through you!" she cried, "it ought to be! I couldn't say it to anybody else, and yet *you* don't understand! You're the first—doesn't that matter? isn't that important?— Sometimes—when I've thought of you, I've been ashamed of things. Do you know what Doris said to me one day? She said: 'I wouldn't like to look the way you do; it's horrid!' She made me worse ashamed, but I needn't be any more,—need I? I'm not going to be! You—you—"

She put her light arms round him, and to his breast her shadowed pale face, that was to him not so real now as the face of a dream. He knew, and did not know, that she kissed him, many times. He was under compulsion to stand up.

"Goodnight," he said, and then caught sudden sight of himself as preposterous, a sight determining his resolution.

"What is it?" She drew away, but held him still. "Is it your wife?"

"Oh, Olga!" He snatched at the old false reason. "She's not going to be better than you! You wouldn't—"

"That doesn't matter—it doesn't! You shan't go!" she cried out, looking like a mother,—a look tragic, dominating. The whiteness of her lips and the usurping haggardness of her face enhanced her transformation. She clung to him.

"Don't you see I *must*?" But her sweet and bitter violence was deterring him from the goal of his words at the moment when she released him.

"You shan't stay to-morrow! No, I can't—I hate you! You've taken it all away from me! I didn't be-

long to you—you're not mine—and I don't want your bracelet any more!"

Her changed look, as she pulled at the bracelet, which would not easily come unclasped, chilled him: he knew that she thought him a fool, and that, like Muriel, and as Muriel had said she would, she despised him: despised him for his feelings and his principles and his half-measures, for his set resolve that cut such a sorry figure under the passion that shook and seared, but would not boldly break it.

"There!" she cried, holding the bracelet to him, then throwing it on the bed.

He fell back, after that moment, on being what he was, on doing what he "had to do." Those waves no longer rolled up and back again, but a single drawing tide had come for him, with power of outer reach. She gazed at him, with losing eyes, from the distance that she knew.

CHAPTER XXIX

ST. FRANZ struck Lawrance, on his first view, as ugly and dirty. The snow had begun to melt on the lower slopes; further up it lay caked and gleaming, sometimes with a bluish whiteness in the strong sun. It seemed an inhospitable country, unfriendly to efforts of intelligence, with a cold machine-like demand for efforts of the body. The little houses of the Châlet type looked all as though they had been put, awkwardly, in the wrong places; against the snow they had a yellow dirty look, a look that was on everything,—on the piled-up wood seen everywhere, on the roads scraped of snow, on the balconies, with their chairs and beds, their rugs and cushions, on the plump peasants, with their heavy brows and stupid faces. They, too, had this yellow dirty look, even though they were rosy-cheeked.

The mountains were not very high: after the other Alps by which Lawrance and his sister had passed, they seemed dwarfed. Then those trees, with their very bright, their painted, green: Lawrance was not inclined to accept the unfamiliarity of them, either. He sat in his room at the sanitarium—friends and relatives of patients could stay there,—looking away from the window at his unopened trunk. Letty's room was next to his. He was not sorry to be running some slight risk of consumption. But was he? The people here took all manner of precautions, and the air was so good. Its pe-

culiar rare quality did not suit Lawrance's heart, he had found that out already; he was breathless and a little faint from walking upstairs. But no doubt he was tired from the journey— What a horrible depressing place! There was no softness, no subtlety, anywhere: it was made for hard, insensitive, brutal people. The very flowers had no caress in their bloom; they were unfeelingly bright, like those trees and the feathery vivid green grass down in the valleys.

Letty tapped from outside. As he said "Yes!" he was reminded of those taps of Muriel's on the communicating door of their rooms at Malstowe. Was there always to be another woman—keeping him from Olga—tapping at his door?

"I simply love this place!" cried Letty.

She looked as pretty and as happy as he had ever seen her: yet he could not be glad. He reproached himself angrily, as he had many times reproached himself during their journey. The higher Letty's spirits, the more depressed were his own, in obedience, it seemed, to some natural law. Lawrance was increasingly convinced of sin, afflicted by his own immorality, restive under it.

"I'm sure I shall get quite well here," Letty went brightly on. "Don't you like it too?"

"Oh, yes, of course I do."

"So this situation of mine is my reward for virtue," he was thinking. "Am I glad—can I be—that I left Olga like that?" What would it have been if. . . . Would his arms have been so empty then; empty by night, empty by day?

"There seem to be some awfully nice people staying here. I just saw such a handsome young man in the passage."

"I daresay there are lots of handsome men."

Yes, that was what he had felt, when he had got back to his own room that night, that his arms were empty. A void striking from his arms inwards,—and striking ever since then.

"Where is it that those people of yours live, Lady Petistree and Lady Blanche—?"

"Oh,—Villa something. I've got the letter in my suitcase."

He should be wearing the garland of virtue. If he wore it, it was thorny, and he could not be proud of his pain now.

"Isn't it a beautiful place? All the snow, and such bright sunshine!" Letty stood on tiptoe; she threw out her arms. "I feel ever so much better already!"

She went on talking as he got up and looked for the letter in the flap of his valise. "Here it is," he told her. "'Villa Kraus.'"

"What a horrid German name!"

"Oh, this is German-speaking Switzerland. All the names are German."

He should never have kissed Olga that night after the theatre. Yes, that was the beginning of everything. He was suffering for the immorality of that, not for the morality of his later refusals. But yet—

"How stern you're looking, Oliver! It doesn't matter so much the names being German, does it?"

"Oh, no!" He smiled with a smile that seemed to strain his cheeks. "And the money's French, anyhow!"

"Well, that's something!" She laughed. "Don't go losing that letter." She took it, and read aloud: "'The Countess of Petistree, Villa Kraus.—Introducing Oliver Lawrance, Esq., and Miss Lawrance.' It was

very nice of Lord Burpham, wasn't it?—especially as he didn't know me. But of course,"—she was increasingly gay—"he knew how nice *you* were!"

Lawrance, thinking of the intention of that letter, looked sterner still. "Oh," he said, "they were finding it pretty dull here!"

"I expect they're the kind of people who are bored in any place they're not used to. I'm not a bit like that. I don't mean to be bored. I don't see how any one can be, in this air! Wasn't the journey exciting, too? Those soldiers in red trousers guarding the railway lines! I shall always remember seeing that bridge—you know, the bridge near Amiens that they showed us, the one the French had blown up when the Germans were getting so near Paris. Fancy—they'd been fighting only a mile or two off from where we were. Then directly we got into Switzerland everything was different—I suppose they'll stay neutral; do you think they will?"

She chattered on, sitting on his bed. He felt that he was without life; even the flick of disliking the place had left him.—How curious that he had once been frightened by the idea of annihilation, he was thinking, as he murmured something about the nuisance of their having had to wait so long at Folkestone and Boulogne. He had never before reached the point where he would have deliberately preferred non-existence to existence.

"Let's go out!" said the girl, teased by his irresponsiveness.

He told her that she ought to rest after the journey. "Doctor Meyer's coming to see you, too."

"Come along!" She did not argue.

A little way outside the sanitarium they passed a par-

ticularly good looking young man of about Lawrance's age. He took off his straw hat, and bowed to them with a radiant smile that showed teeth white as a negro's. Lawrance was startled out of his apathy into the observation that the young man compelled. He was beautifully dressed in grey; his double-breasted coat had a perfect hang, and his brown boots looked expensive, but not too new. His young but not boyish face was extremely sunburnt; he had crisp short curls of a blond gold, glistening.

Lawrance turned and watched the receding figure. "He's going to the sanitarium," he said. "He can't be ill, surely?" But the figure, he reflected, might be too dainty for health. Yes, the legs and waist were certainly abnormally slender, though the shoulders looked broad,—padded, perhaps, thought Lawrance, who began to feel, mildly, the natural male resentment.

"A pretty fellow," he said sarcastically.

"He looks awfully nice," retorted Letty, who had not turned to look back. "He's the one I saw in the passage." She flushed slightly. "He's got such jolly eyes."

"I didn't notice his eyes. I don't like his mouth, though; and what the deuce does he mean by taking off his hat to us?"

"Oh, he's in the sanitarium, and so are we. I suppose everybody knows one another here."

"I don't in the least want to know that chap."

Letty would get excited, he was thinking; it would be worse than at Malstowe. Fellows like Phillips were everywhere. He looked at his sister, whose gaiety was now subdued. She was not "fast," certainly she wasn't. She was a "nice girl," the kind of girl you could trust,

the kind of girl who wouldn't think of anything "horrid." You could see, from her wholesome mouth and her confident playful eyes that she was, from a brother's point of view, "the right sort." She remained silent; he saw that she was half smiling.

"Look here, Letty," he said rather awkwardly. "You must keep pretty quiet here, you know. I've got to—you know. You want to get well, don't you?"

"Oh, I'll get well all right! Don't you worry—and don't be silly."

As they were making their way to one of the narrow mountain-paths she grew suddenly tired, and had to rest. They came back to the sanitarium slowly and by degrees, though the way was short. She lay down on a long chair on the balcony outside her room: she was exhausted.

Lawrance felt a brute, but he could not help being glad of this diversion that compelled him to be concerned.

CHAPTER XXX

THE handsome young man reappeared the next morning: he came up to Lawrance in the big bright hall of the sanitarium, and introduced himself. Cyprian Strange, his name was. Lawrance could not make up his mind if his manners were good: they were certainly easy; they had a vivid nonchalance that was unusual and taking. He succeeded in being companionable at once, but not in the least intrusive or stressed. "He doesn't want to know *me*, confound him!" thought Lawrance, as young Strange amicably rippled off his inquiries and his suggestions. "It's Letty he's after. This is his first move."

"No, I can't say that I do like the place,—as yet," he replied ungraciously to a question that was followed by a pause.

"Of course you don't. No one could,—not any one with any intelligence, any taste. We poor devils have to stay, though. You're not one of us, I can see that." The tone was suave, with an intentional flavour of flattering jealousy. "It's a dreadful place. As these Americans say, it's the limit. All those horrid bric-à-brac shops, with their souvenirs and their Tauchnitz books! And have you seen that semi-English sporting hotel where people arrive in cars and wear knickerbockers and tweed suits? I can't stand the very name of Harris tweed, can you?" He eyed Lawrance tentatively.

"Oh, I don't know. It's the dirty look of everything that gets on my nerves. And the climate doesn't suit me, either."

"You're right; you're right, sir! The whole place does look soiled. Odd that that should have struck you, too. And then there's that abominable cemetery,—but look here,"—he began to speak eagerly, still keeping his bright and not large hazel eyes on his interlocutor, "you wait till you get to know some of the people,—some of the patients, some of *us*. We're a fine lot, I can tell you! All nationalities— Are you doing anything? We might go out and I could tell you."

"It won't be too much for you?" Lawrance did not disguise his reluctance.

"Well, it's some time since I had my last little hæmorrhage."

They went out into the liberal sunlight. Lawrance felt quite as though his arm were being taken, but it wasn't: he glanced sharply at Cyprian Strange, to make sure that he was not being touched.

"There's a Russian here,—or I believe he's a Pole,—he's the most entertaining. Desperately in love with a little Italian girl who won't look at him. They're romantic, these Poles." Lawrance's attention quickened at the mention of a nationality in which Olga had a share. "He shot himself. Through the chest, too, but he didn't die. He'd been given up because of his lungs long ago. But now he's getting better, and his doctor thinks he'll recover. His one wish now is that he should live and the girl die. Very likely she will. To round the story off, she ought now to be hopelessly in love with him, but I'm afraid she isn't." He stooped, picked a bright flower, and put it in his buttonhole.

"Are there many love-affairs among the patients?"

"All the time." Young Cyprian spoke with conviction. "It's perfectly scandalous. The discipline is so very lax. Of course if your temperature goes up above a certain point you're kept in bed. But there's no system. It's an individual thing; depends on your doctor's personal orders. They are, I suppose, to be considered as binding.— There's a perpetual shifting about—you'll see—in the dining room; people coming and going all the time, to and from the general table. Dramatic, you know; yes, really, it's a bit dramatic. You never know who will go next. They disappear: sometimes they come back, sometimes they don't. I've seen a good few of 'em picked off. They take them out by night, you know, when nobody's looking. Everything kept dark; so discouraging to *us* if it weren't. But of course we know all right."

Lawrance recoiled: it was abominable, he thought, of this fellow to talk to a patient's brother in that way, the first time he got hold of him. He determined to show his disapproval by not speaking. Cyprian Strange walked on, debonair as ever, smiling to himself, not at all embarrassed by the silence. He broke it, at length, quite casually.

"You won't be here long," he remarked. "Your wife will be cured in a month or two. I can always tell with a new case. In fact I know as much about consumption as the doctors. Three classes—Live: Die: Doubtful. And the doubtful class is a very small one. The only one I've been wrong about in the last year is that Russian. But it was his trying to kill himself that saved him.— How is your wife today?"

“My sister has to stay in bed,—for to-day, at any rate.”

“I’m sorry.” Cyprian made no reference to his mistake, but there was a change in his expression. “But you know that often happens the first day. The journey and the change—it all sends the temperature up. Your sister will be all right tomorrow. I’m glad the snow’s melting.”

Lawrance had been waiting, on the defensive, for the young gallant to mention Letty, but he recognized that to this mention of her his defensive could not apply. He was now well on his slow way to forgive Strange’s cynical flippancy: it did not seem to have been in such bad taste, after all.

Cyprian continued to be conversational as they walked down and up the slopes, among the pines, and along the little mountain-paths, or stood and watched the “great blond bully-boys,” as he phrased it, “showing off as daredevils, crossing glaciers,” and a party of mountain-climbers, with Alpenstocks and great knapsacks, streaming up from the German hotel. He loved looking about, he informed his companion, and he loved walking: he was always walking too much and bringing on hæmorrhages. “I give myself five years more,” he said. “I’m a slow case.” Lawrance had to admit that he was diverted, that it was more tolerable being with Strange than being alone: but “Hang it,” he thought at the same time, “that’s of course just what he wants me to feel; that’s what he’s after.” He had given the fellow no encouragement, yet he was “getting in with” him splendidly. Strange had the strong advantage, which Lawrance could not clearly place, of being totally dis-

connected with Olga; he gave Lawrance the full view of a sphere completely foreign to the girl; he provided precisely the refreshment and relaxation of which Lawrance stood in need. Letty's brother was still, however, mistrustful to a certain point, and irritated now and again by some shades of Cyprian's way with him, a way which could bear remotely the implication, friendly enough, that he was a bit stupid and a bit crude. It was irritating, too, that smooth deference of this good-looking fair fellow's to him, as to a distinctly older man,—his calling him occasionally "sir," for example,—considering that there could not be more than a year or two's difference in their ages. Strange was treating him as a chaperon; he was being galant to him—out of habit, perhaps,—as if Lawrance were a rather elderly lady.— Especially since he had found out the relationship to Letty. All the same the chap was diverting; he took Lawrance's mind off, he passed the time. He had a certain impudence that was really rather becoming, though it had no business to be.

Lawrance that evening remembered things Strange had said; with an amusement that his ingrained decency a little resented; things about women, in particular. Strange had the greatest contempt for women. They should either, he had declared, be insulted or fooled, if you wanted to get hold of them. "And it's a question if they're even worth the trouble of doing that. We get to know just how much the game with girls is worth, don't we? We get to put them in their right place. One can be quite happy without them," he added, increasing his companion's determination to be watchful. Lawrance observed, and checked the fact, that Letty was not mentioned again.

Young Strange would put a lavender-gloved finger to his dainty little nose at Death: but casually, without any violence of gesture. "I keep the old grey dog at a distance still," he said. "Some of my friends have been bitten lately, though." He would make little hits at Mortality.

Lawrance, after very few days, was drawn into a sort of intimacy with this man, whose bland yet stinging aplomb was continually striking him as being the most immoral thing he had ever come across. But he was in no mood for the exercise of his own morality against the vicious blitheness of this new comrade: he was apathetic, willing enough to drift. He did indeed pay tribute to his conscience by arguing that it was an excellent thing that he should be often with young Strange, because that narrowed the fellow's opportunities with Letty; but the argument was listlessly made. Lawrance felt very much older and milder, and dull in a new way, dull to himself, as he had never been before. He wondered sometimes that Cyprian Strange could put up with him: certainly he was a sorry companion.

Cyprian invariably paid much more attention to Lawrance than to Letty when the three of them were together. At Letty he would smile in his dazzling sudden way; he was of course consistently galant with her, but with a gallantry of discreet poise and light distant wings. She was always there, it seemed, as his good friend's sister: Lawrance was never "the girl's brother," not for a moment.

Lady Petistree and her daughter were, as might have been supposed, already known to Cyprian. "I cultivate the aristocracy," he remarked. "I always have. I believe in a certain amount of honest snobbery." He

could not help showing that he was rather impressed, even a little piqued, by the Lawrances having a letter of introduction. He was informative about the two ladies. "Lady Blanche—" he told Lawrance in the course of one of their frequent walks together,—“her husband killed at Mons, I expect you know. Captain Voltalin. She went into a consumption afterwards. Too faithful to his memory, that was it,” he added, anticipating and enjoying with keen relish the twinge of this observation. “She’s happier now, though, and I think she’ll get well. A tall fair girl, rather pretty. The mother’s a nonentity. One of the ‘many too many.’— They never call on any one, you know. And anyhow the newcomers call here,—Continental fashion. I called on them myself,—just walked in one afternoon. That was all right—why not? When will you go?”

But Lawrance would not call on Lady Petistree yet. Letty was in a fluctuating state, with an uncertain temperature. Her doctor frequently insisted on her staying in bed, and on those days she was nervous and irritable. Lawrance would sit on her balcony and listen to her complaints. These balconies, with their chairs and beds, overlooked one another, producing thus a peculiarly melancholy and subduing effect on him, but no effect at all, apparently, upon her. In bed she was neither melancholy nor subdued, but petulantly restless, and when she was up, the released vitality of her spirit was more disconcerting still. She made friends on every side; she talked too much; she overdid everything. She worked up a lively interest in taking lessons in French from a young Hungarian who spoke the language nearly as badly as she did. He told her he was a naturalized Greek. She perplexed herself excitedly over the cos-

tume that she should wear at a coming fancy dress ball that was to be held in the sanitarium. She was popular and made several conquests. Lawrance vowed that he would not countenance even the small diversion of a call at the Villa Kraus till she had really settled down. Meanwhile Doctor Meyer was fairly encouraging.

“It is the mind, my dear young sir.” He spoke through his beard, with a thick yet lucid emphasis, in short and often uncompleted sentences, with a timed interval between each. “The mind. If you could lay just a little finger. It is like what is in a clock. How do you call it?— A pendulum?— Ah, yes! If you could touch the pendulum.” He held out a forefinger, moved it horizontally backwards and forwards, then touched it with the forefinger of his other hand. “Jus’ like that. Or the tongue of a bell. You stop it. You see? The young lady moves too much—inside. The same, too, when she is in bed. More, perhaps. You understand me, my dear young sir? To be *joos* a leetle more—you know—steady. It is not a bad case. Not bad at all. Not now. But if we could make her steadied. Settled. If she could be interested in something that is quiet. It is difficult, I know. It is always difficult. It may be you will think of some way. For this you would be a good doctor; you would be a better doctor than I, my dear young sir. If she were phlegmatic, as they say you English are, if she were content. We want something to make her content. She might be cured—nearly—in a month—in two months.”

“How silly of him!” was what Letty said when the substance of this discourse was passed on to her. “Why, I am quiet. I’m as quiet as I can be! We don’t do

anything, and I've never been in bed so much in my life."

She grew restive with her brother. She would tell him that they weren't the Siamese twins, and now and again she gave him the slip. He did not reproach her. He stood on his dignity, and was helped to this position by his inertia. How could he be "after her" every minute? He did what he could. He had gone so far as to warn her about young Strange. "Take care: remember you've never met a man of his kind before." That was sensible enough, but she had only laughed at him.

Lawrance was occupied to some extent by his work for the Magazine. Every week he despatched manuscript to Mr. Inge. Then he wrote regularly to his wife and to his mother, regularly and mechanically. He did not write to Olga. He thought it would be weak to write. He had said: "Wait for me": he would not repeat it. He had given her his address before he left Glasden Road,—he had stayed only the one night,—and she had handed the paper back to him, with no betraying sign of any emotion. He concluded, or determined to conclude, that she simply meant they had better not correspond. Muriel wrote to him in a reserved, but friendly tone: she always inquired after Letty. Mrs. Lawrance wrote exactly the same kind of letters that she had been writing her son ever since he went to his Private School: she often did not refer to Letty at all, except to send her her love.

Lawrance's mood of apathy did not hold constant occupation. There came after awhile the alternation of a mood of savage desire, of passion clawed and fanged that tore at him as at an anchorite victim, and left him in the throes of a saddening hunger. Olga, in waking

thoughts and in dreams, crucified his flesh. He could understand the need of that adjusting remedy for passionate anchorites,—self-torture. When under this mood or its after-effects, he let his wilful sister go her own way entirely,—then only his affection for her seemed to waver and fail,—he applied himself much more arduously than usual to his work for the Office, and he avoided Cyprian Strange.

CHAPTER XXXI

AS the weeks went, Letty improved in health. Doctor Meyer was much pleased with her. "She has sense," he said. "She has will. She is cured. She shall so surely be cured that she is cured now. You understand me?" Quite suddenly, it seemed, she had become stable and calm,—docile. The change struck Lawrance as unnatural; he suspected it at first, but it held ground. She had come to be perfectly willing to rest, to do what she was told. She would read Tauchnitz novels, or sit still and contented for hours together on her balcony, resting a tranquil gaze upon the smally successful landscape, upon the mediocre pines. Yet she was not lethargic: she was herself, but older and more serene.

Lawrance acknowledged the working virtue of the air. He wrote happily to his mother and his wife, and he was himself, if not happy, satisfied and justified. Something at least had been done: he had done something. Because he had, as he thought, saved Letty, his affection for her returned with a will,—an affection of quickened pulse. They would soon go back to England; he would see Olga again; he would lose neither Olga nor Letty: he would have been right. He indulged these anticipations without thought of the barrier that his wife presented, though the barrier was as real as ever. Such reflections as he entertained about his child that was to be born

were always in rigid separation, and he could not make them important. When he tried to imagine his son or his daughter, his imagination failed him: he found it difficult to believe in offspring, and still more difficult to apply offspring to Muriel and himself together, as equal sharers. Muriel mentioned her health now and then; she told him she was quite well.

They had been several times to the Villa Kraus, and Cyprian Strange had occasionally come with them. Lawrance thought him a shade too well-mannered with Lady Blanche. Lady Blanche, if she had not been dressed with such skilful adaptation, would have had to confess to being built on too large a scale: as things were, she was Juno-like still in a girlish way, and her mourning set off her fairness admirably. Her rather too full face was of a usual pink and white. There was intelligence in her blue eyes, but an intelligence demurring to effort. The eyes hinted a possible betrayal of cruelty, cruelty of a patrician kind, in which she herself would not be too much involved. She did not interest Lawrance, neither did Lawrance interest her, but there was evidently a rapport between her and Cyprian. He was recognizably a sort of squire for her, in his place: he pleased her, but any excitement that he gave was well under the poised young lady's control. She certainly had no affection for him: it was obvious that affection was not in her line. Lady Petistree, a slim straight woman with abundant grey hair and thin grey eyebrows, questioningly arched, did not favour the young beau, but she took to Lawrance, who might, if he had been so minded, have reaped a reward for his sacrificial exile by sitting and talking for hours with this elderly countess. His being married and yet not middle-aged seemed to give him a standing with

her, but it was some time before she could determine who he was and what was his reason for existing. She had a particularly vague mind.

"And what relation were you to dear Charley?" she had asked suddenly in her low blurred voice, during the first visit: and a little later: "Wasn't there an aunt of yours,—one of the Wrevilles?"—which she pronounced "Wrivvles."

She had a pleasing childishness: one of her ungrounded convictions was that St. Franz was within sound of the guns: "We can hear them doing it from here; making war, you know." When Cyprian informed her that Lawrance went in for writing: "Writing?" she queried, with sweet simplicity. "Books?" She was always in the same tone.

Both ladies were "nice" to Letty, though the daughter, before Cyprian, was apt to play her, as "the other girl," off against herself, with the usual dissimulation of aim. But this was not done in any earnest: it was a matter of simple reflex action, and put nobody out. Lady Blanche, being as her brother-in-law had said, bored at St. Franz, was inclined to be more amiable than anything else to these strangers. It is true that she tried amusing herself by saying little snubbing things to Lawrance now and again: he remarked once that there had been a "rage" a few winters ago for a certain indoor game: "Oh, indeed," she replied; "I was spared it." He did not miss the implication that the game had been confined to bourgeois circles, nor did Letty, who was ruffled. Lawrance was not ruffled at all; the constant background of his emotional concerns was incompatible with any social anxieties or social lapses. "Well, I won a match-holder at that game, anyhow," he had rejoined

calmly, and when Lady Blanche neatly shot out to trip him up with: "And what is a match-holder?" he kept his balance perfectly in the grave reply: "A receptacle for holding matches." She had the satisfaction of noticing that he blushed a moment later: an illegitimate satisfaction, because the blush came from a sudden anticipation of Lady Petistree's writing to Lord Burpham, or meeting him later, and revealing that Olga and Letty were two quite different people.

The two patrician widows did not embarrass Lawrance, but they more and more impressed him as irrelevant. Now if only Muriel could have had his chance with them! He had refrained from even mentioning the ladies in his letters to her; he knew she would be pained and envious. If only she— What a pity! But what had Lady Petistree and Lady Blanche Voltalin to do with him? he thought: why was he sitting there with them at this Villa Kraus? For the first time he was confronted by the curious fact that Life is forever bringing us into relations with people who are foreign. Why do we all submit? he thought: why do we not put our hands over our eyes and turn away? But instead, our submission goes further still: we consent to lose those whom we like and those whom we love. It was quite the way of things that he should be in the Villa Kraus and not in the house in the Glasden Road. Thousands of others—millions—shared his destiny.

He envied Cyprian Strange. Cyprian could evidently turn everything to his purpose. He enjoyed himself at the sanitarium; he enjoyed himself with the two ladies. Their drawing-room had drama for him: he played his part, with interest in himself and in others,—no matter what others, and no matter where he might be. He

would discourse at great length upon Lady Blanche and Lady Petistree, with many epithets for each of them and many flings of phrase: he would discourse upon the inmates of the sanitarium,—Gustav de Létay, the Hungarian who said he was a naturalized Greek,—“that predacious little devil”: Raymond Vignolles, who had been an actor at the Comédie Française and whose wife was “touchingly devoted, I hear, to the care of his larynx”: Heinrich Ehrmann, the rich German Jew, always gutturally declaring that “My only vish, shentlemen and ladies, is to be in the background”; “And he will be,” said Cyprian with a leer. “Wait a month, and he’ll be *well* in the background, and a good thing too!” Then there was Ramalinga Lal, of Madras, “a cynical dog, a philosophic dog,” who had given Lawrance pause by declaring once that if the verdict of history on the war were published now in any belligerent country, the author would at once be put in prison and probably shot. He was naïve, too, this Indian, in curious contrast,—naïvely vain, spending much pains on his moustache, and more than once announcing the fact of his distinguished birth: “Though I do not at all like to say it, I have the blood of kings in my veins.” Lawrance liked him, and admired his intellect which was considerable, and formidably weighted by study. This weight rather irritated Cyprian, but Ramalinga’s personal foibles pleased him hugely. “These Indians, though,—they should be kept well under.”

All these people flicked Cyprian’s observation in curiosity, gave him material on which he seized with deft slim fingers. “And think!” he exclaimed, “what a situation for us all—English and Germans and Austrians and French and the rest—here in this hole scooped out

for us in the belly of Europe! War north and south and east and west! This is about the only place where English and Germans are allowed to make love to one another; doesn't that strike you as dramatic? By the Lord, there's some drama in that, some lustre; what do you think! You've no idea how the war has cheered us all up. Oh, I tell you, it has brightened our lot,—our trivial round, our common task. We all of us think: 'Well, anyhow, we've got as good a chance as the man in the trenches.' Well, I suppose the press-gangs will soon be getting to work in earnest in England?"

Lawrance yielded to him more and more, and even came to share some of his diversion in the general spectacle; though he could not make that diversion vivid. He often wondered if he really liked this debonair curly-haired young blade or really disliked him, and in the end he concluded that he both liked and disliked. In spite of his deepset nerve of Puritanism, Lawrance felt that it was a good thing that Cyprian should be happy in his particular way: sometimes his equally deepset nerve of passion would vibrantly carry him on to the rebellious conviction that anything could be pardoned to a man who made much of life. Cyprian's careless defiance of the code that Lawrance himself made so much of set up assailing doubts. "There's nothing we can't do, really," the pretty anarchist had flung off one day. "It all depends on how you do it. Style is everything. They'd stand a good deal from me," he added, with a conceit so lightly weighted that the other could not resent it. "But of course there's nothing in their morality, really,—the sly dogs! It's partly a ritual and partly a protection."

Lawrance could never have been seduced by the im-

moralties of old Mr. Flynn, by those spleenful anarchies of his, half-jovially defiant, always ungaugedly reaching out for a philosophic dress: but this idle *young* fellow, this "Indifférent," with his good temper and his good looks, was a far more formidable disintegrating force.

"There's no doubt," he said to himself one day, as Cyprian tripped by his side, after a visit they had made together to the Villa Kraus, "there's no doubt you do get a great deal out of it all."

"Oh, my name is Lady Blanche,"—the golden youth was singing and making little grimaces—"my name is Lady Blanche, damn your eyes!" Lawrance recognized the variation of a ribald song once current at Oxford. "Oh, you can patronize, can't you, *in your way*,—you can put us in our right places—ve-ry well! She's a beauty, she's a fine upstanding mare; we know her little tricks, don't we? the whole bloody bag of 'em! Well, m'lady, I guess you're one of those who were born to lie between lawful sheets."

Shortly after Letty's turn for the better Cyprian had grown much more intimately freespoken with Lawrance. "Do tell me about your amours," he would demand, and when Lawrance did not respond, he would give full and varied information about some of his own. "We consumptives are always reckless, you know," he said, "reckless and amorous."

Cyprian's principal topics in these later days were Desire and Death, with occasional excursions to Morality. He insisted that Morality didn't "cut much ice, really,—not anywhere, you see, not really." Once he had elaborated: "It's expediency rules the roost, and the line of least resistance. Men are faithful to their wives out of sheer inertia, or because they're short of

money. We used to think when we were boys that Life was going to be a terrific struggle between the right and the wrong,—all sorts of sweet temptations. I tell you you have to *make* your temptations, in this world, and it's the hardest thing to do really successfully."

"You're wrong!" Lawrance had broken in, with a bitterness and a violence that startled the other.

"Ah,—well!" Cyprian paused and laughed. "Of course if you run away, all sorts of things may happen.— Well, I may be wrong, a little wrong. There might be temptations for some people in this place. What a place! More like a bawdy-house than a sanitarium, isn't it?"

"Oh, that's absurd! You like saying sensational things, you can't believe them. There may be two or three—three or four, perhaps—but to say that—"

"Oh, well, it's not very important! After all, desire isn't everything. I've often been quite happy without it." He spoke defiantly, as though expecting contradiction: then changed his tone. "Paddling my feet in brooks, watching the tiny fountains spout up between my toes. I've often thought that simple laziness was quite enough to ask of Life. I think so now. Quite enough. I must say, though, I should rather like to be what they call 'a man of letters.' One like Anatole France. But I never write anything but my diary."

Lawrance, after this, used to wonder if Cyprian could have used his faculty for observation in writing. He came to the conclusion that he could not have, that he was an egoist in the wrong way for that, that he had none of the requisite objectivity. Lawrance himself observed much more objectively, though not nearly so keenly and with much less personal satisfaction. Cy-

prian seemed to smear with himself everything he touched, to smear it thickly and gluttonously, with the sweet rich butter of his personality.

As Letty's health grew more and more stable, Cyprian's more and more wavered. He began not to be able to walk far, was indignant at his inability, tried to walk, had to give it up. One day he had a bad hæmorrhage, and was kept in bed, for the first time for months. Lawrance went to see him, and found him much weakened, but determined to talk.

"I know I shan't recover," he said. "I know too much about this damned disease. It doesn't matter what I do now. Consumptives always think they're going to get better: I'm not fooled that way. Well, when we die, we're gone."

Lawrance felt that he was set for a disquisition about Death, and tried to stop him. "Nonsense; you mustn't—"

"Of course we're gone.— I say, you might go to that bottom drawer there and get out a bottle of brandy. I want to drink it with my coffee. I persuaded Lisl to get me coffee. You might as well," he added as Lawrance hesitated. "It's for a dying man.— 'We are dying day by day,' as that quizzical hymn has it, but some of us not quite so soon, Mr. Lawrance, not quite so soon!— I drink it very seldom— Thank you." Lawrance recognized the brandy as a particularly fine vintage of a famous French firm. "There's a liqueur glass wrapped up in tissue paper. I always wash it myself. Under the shirts. You don't mind pouring it out for me, do you?—We're gone, yes. Think of that poor little English governess who died last week—thousands

like her—you can't imagine her existing now, can you? And it's the same with all of us." He took three tiny relishing sips of the brandy, then poured a very little, very carefully, into his coffee. "You've only to look at a corpse to know it's all over. Some sooner, some later. What a chance it all is! I shall be quit of these malicious mountains, though, damn 'em! Old Müller told me a week ago that I was killing myself. Of course he knew why. Yet I wanted to live: I admit I wanted to live. Well, my only amusement to-day has been to have the *Continental Daily Mail* read to me."

"Look here, isn't there something I could read to you now?"

"No." Cyprian took a dainty mouthful of his seasoned coffee. "I want to talk. Not for long; I can't. Müller will be round soon enough.— I take a special interest in the Casualty Lists, you know. I scan them with a certain avidity. I'm worse off than those ammunition-bearers, or whatever they call them, now, though. I don't think I've one chance in ten— Well, I've managed to live longer than some of my friends—not much consolation, considering that I want to live forever. One of them was killed only the other day; Raynes, his name was." He sipped again, then poured more brandy. "Edward Raynes.— We weren't friends for long, though. He had a certain humour, he could laugh; but he was really commonplace. I found him out. A discreet philistine, and a bit of a bounder. Shot clean through the head, they tell me, somewhere near Lille."

"Like Rosy Mayhew's father," thought Lawrance, as Cyprian took another little mouthful. The fair youth

now emptied the glass deliberately into his cup, on timed completion of his graded preparation for the draught of crowning fervour.

"Oh, damn, there's Müller. I say, this is what I wanted to tell you. I've got a Diary, there are some good things in it, I know there are. Well, I've left directions that you're to have it at my death." He finished his cup with one rich gulp. "But they may forget. See that you get it, please do. I keep it in that right-hand top drawer, at the bottom. You'll remember, won't you?— Put the glass back in its tissue paper, please.— I really believe some of it might be worth publishing; I should like that, I like my little diary.— You see—" He stopped, exhausted.

"Of course I will," Lawrance gave rapid assurance. He heard Doctor Müller's voice outside the door. "Of course. You can count on me."

He was strongly moved by the haggardness of Cyprian's admirably handsome young face, with its crisp gold curls, still so carefully—so pathetically—arranged.

"You'll do what you can, won't you, eh? I thought, you see, being on a paper and all that— In with some publishers, I suppose?"

"I'll do what I can. I promise you." Lawrance resisted the impulse to add the conventional: "But of course you're going to get better." No, one couldn't say that kind of thing to Cyprian Strange.

"Good-bye," he said instead, as Doctor Müller entered.

CHAPTER XXXII

LAWRANCE was wakened the next morning by the delivery of a telegram. It was from his father-in-law, and imperatively urged him to come back at once. "Muriel's condition dangerous." The young man was numbed at first by the shock of this utter unexpectedness, the time for the baby being still distant by two or three months: then he was horrified by a leaping in him of hope for Muriel's death. He cried out in repulsion from himself, he could not have believed that he was so evil. Thenceforward he tried not to think of the event, for fear of being taken again from so horrid an ambush. He sent a telegram in reply that he was coming as soon as possible, and he had dressed and finished packing his valise before Letty was stirring.

Letty—after her "Poor Magsie!"—wanted to go with him. She was well now, she said; she did not at all care to be at St. Franz by herself. It would be absurd for him to come back for her, yet, again, it would not do for her to travel alone. She was particularly anxious to go then: she used one argument after another, she seemed set for the immediate journey. Her brother found her entirely unreasonable. How could she go then? There was the packing, there were endless things to be done,—the passports, and so on,—he could hardly do everything in time for himself. Besides, she was not absolutely recovered, not at all; she would have a relapse. How could she think of going straight back, there and then,

with him, at top speed? Everything would be undone. He could not in the least understand why she should cling so obstinately to so absurd an idea.

In one of the intervals of his hurrying backwards and forwards between the Sanitarium and the British and French Consulates he called at the Villa Kraus and sought alliance with the two ladies. Lady Blanche, fortunately, decided that she would be more interested than not in lending her co-operation. "Why, of course we'll look after your sister," she said in her clear authoritative voice. And: "Why, of course," Lady Petis-tree echoed with her vague air. Lady Blanche went further: she herself was practically cured, they were going home in a few weeks—a month, perhaps—and if Miss Lawrance would come with them—?

Miss Lawrance's brother was most grateful. He did not at all want to return to St. Franz: the idea of returning to this dirty-yellow place was in fact intolerable; equally intolerable, whatever might happen. He could not help wondering, though, if by any untoward chance they might meet with Lord Burpham in London. He imagined all three of them in Lord Burpham's house in Queen Street, having tea with him. What then?

Letty yielded, but in yielding she surprised her brother by an outburst of tears. He could not at all understand her. These fixed ideas women sometimes got!

Cyprian Strange had been completely dislodged from his mind: but at the last moment Lawrance remembered him, and sent to make inquiries and to let him know that he was called suddenly to England by the illness of his wife. A brief message came back from Doctor Müller that Mr. Strange's condition was precarious. Lawrance, sitting down at his table in hat and waterproof, wrote at

the beck of his wakeful conscience a hurried note to the doctor, giving him the address of the Office, and asking that Mr. Strange's book, "about which he will have given directions," should be sent, by registered post, to him there, "if necessary."

CHAPTER XXXIII

BY the time Lawrance reached the Essex Rectory, after a delayed journey, Muriel was out of danger from the effects of the miscarriage. She was still in bed, she looked pale and drawn, and much older. Her looks had suffered severely, her mouth had new lines. Lawrance knew that he ought not to notice this. His feelings did not, however, give his conscience much trouble: not being uxorious, he was genuinely more sorry for her than for himself. It was feared that she might be permanently an invalid.

She was gracious to him, gracious and forgiving: she behaved very well. But he knew that she had not, as a fact, forgiven: he did not speculate as to whether she ever would. She talked about ordinary things, very little of herself. She was a good patient. Once she said: "I have been rather lonely," but not in a tone that implied "lonely without you." She said she felt rather "weird." He used all his energy upon being tender and considerate to her. Mr. Knight approved of him.

The clergyman had changed; he seemed thinner, he was less self-assured. Lawrance had expected that he would speak to him of the calamity from his private pulpit, drawing lessons, in his way. But he barely alluded to what had happened: "It was terrible, Oliver," was all he said. It was the first time he had ever struck his son-in-law as being sincerely moved, this man who had so

seldom told the truth, so seldom even thought it. He was like a child at that moment. He did not add: "Thy Will be done!" or "We must have faith that it is for the best." Lawrance waited for such words, feeling most strongly that he could not echo them, rebelling, for all that he was so much Christian, against the slavish trick of them, against their cowardly attempt to drug the soul of a tragic moment. "It is for the worst," he would have said, rather: "and we take it for the worst." But Mr. Knight said nothing, either way. He had been there.

Lawrance had written to Olga, saying simply that he was back in England and would be in London soon, when he would see her. He had given no address. It was, of course, reasonable enough that he should return to his work at the Office, after a decent interval. He decided to stay at one of the little Sefton Hotels till he could settle on temporary lodgings in Kensington—Church Walk or the neighbourhood. Their servants were at Mr. Knight's rectory, according to the plan; except Mary, who had kept her word and left. It was arranged that he should come down to see Muriel on Saturdays, staying the night, until she was enough recovered to travel up and open the Chiswick house again. "Well," he said disingenuously, under the resisted stress of his passionate anticipation of Glasden Road, "well, I suppose old Inge will be keen on my getting back."

He left the Rectory on the afternoon of the Sunday week following his arrival. Every day there, after the first, had been the same: nothing had come of any of them. He had sat by Muriel's bed, talking of Letty and her restored health, describing St. Franz—not at all as

he really felt about it—and the journeys; listening to the local news and the news of his brother-in-law Gerald, who had been slightly wounded, but was now back in France. No period in Lawrance's life had ever passed so slowly.

At Liverpool Street he left his luggage in the Cloak Room, and went on at once to Glasden Road. Now that he was out of the railway train his expectations and fears were less painfully acute. The pendant hand of Time seemed suddenly to be clenched for a swift forward sweep to no matter what unknown quarter; it was enough that the sweep was to be swift: this was so much everything that Lawrance was absorbed in the fact, and he watched, fascinated. "Change at Tottenham Court Road" he had to repeat to himself. "Change at Tottenham Court Road." However, when he was actually walking within a hundred yards or so of the house itself, he could not hold back the once more recurring: "I do wish I had had some news of them." "How stupid!" he told himself at once. "You'll have it soon enough now. It'll be all the more interesting." Then his senses withdrew, dulled.

Doris opened the door, started and cried out: "Why, it's Mr. Lawrance!" "Well, you *are* a stranger!" came as an inevitable addition.

She was looking just as Lawrance remembered her on the night when he had taken Olga to the theatre; she seemed perfectly well, quite as happy as she had ever been: and she was better dressed than usual. Lawrance congratulated her gravely on her good looks and good health.

"Oh, well," she said saucily, "I s'pose I *am* my 'old bright self again, Hoppy.'— Mr. Deavitt still comes

round," she went on casually. "He's in khaki now. He's gone to the Base—at Rouen, you know.— Won't you come inside, Mr. Lawrance?" She took on her funny little formal tone.

"Yes," said Lawrance as he went in, "I've heard from him once or twice."

He remembered that Deavitt in his last letter had asked after "Mordie Voltalin." "No doubt," he reflected, "Deavitt would always be quite happy." Part of his job, he had written, was to exchange paper money found on the killed, spoilt by shot and blood. "I'm on the go all the time between 9 & 6."

"He seemed in very good spirits," Lawrance said aloud.

"He's dead nuts on Marjorie! He spoils the kid."

"Is Marjorie here?"

"No, she's gone to the sea with a party of kiddies for the week-end."

They were in the empty dining room. Lawrance's mind kept its dreamy drift to Crockerton Deavitt and his letter. Deavitt had said that his "gags" had worked their way to the trenches, where they went down splendidly. Lawrance recalled, with a swimming sense of distance, some examples he had given: "No shells on tap this afternoon." "A good shot is a dairy-fed one, with ball bearings throughout." Suddenly he noticed that Doris was wearing the bracelet he had given to Olga.

"Shall I light the gas, Mr. Lawrance? Light enough without it, though, isn't it?" The girl spoke quickly, she seemed embarrassedly eager. "You'll take a chair, won't you?— Did you know I've got an awfully good job; I'm in the chorus at the 'Variety.' I have some lines. Dora Howard, my stage-name is. Lucky you

came on Sunday, or I shouldn't have been in. Have you seen the new Revue at the 'Traf.'? They tell me it's simply topping!" She pitched her voice high. "Oh, but you've been abroad, haven't you?— Perhaps I'd better light the gas, after all." She went to pull down the blinds. "When did you come back? I was beginning to think you were going to stay away all the summer—and you have, almost, haven't you?"

"But didn't Olga get my letter?"

"Your letter? I didn't know—"

She looked distressed and ill at ease. Lawrance stared at her. He was no longer dulled and dreamy, but perturbed, sure that something was dreadfully wrong.

"Where is Olga?" he demanded. "Where is she?" His heart-beats strangled him.

"Oh— Well—well, you see, Mr. Lawrance, she isn't here just now. She's—"

"Do be quick, Doris, you might tell me where she is."

"Oh, here's Father!" The girl jumped up, relieved.

"Where's Olga?" Lawrance asked of Mr. Flynn: then shook hands with his old friend, who looked away from him, just as he had at their last leavetaking. His clasp was limp.

"Where's Olga?" Lawrance repeated.

"Gone to Canada." The old man turned away, and walked over with deliberation to the empty fireplace.

"There! I didn't want to tell him!" Doris's voice trembled. She put her hand to her mouth, and hurried from the room. Lawrance did not notice her.

"Alone? Has she gone alone?" He raised his voice, as though old Flynn were deaf.

"She went with Patsey." Flynn shuffled to the sideboard and poured himself out a drink of whiskey.

“Why on earth—?”

“I told you.” The old man gave him a sideways glance, almost malicious. “I was right—quite right. Figs and thistles, grapes and thorns—remember? She’d have been happier with you. I know Olga.” He sat down, holding his glass carefully between his hands. “She’s married, too.”

Lawrance remained standing in the same spot. There seemed to be no meaning in all this. Where was there a gauge? He wanted a gauge. He was dissociated, his senses seemed thinly fluctuant. He was sure that his voice could not reach the Mariner, who was no longer the Mariner, but somebody of quite a different sort. The curious thing was that that picture of “Boston Harbor, 1876,” was just the same.

“Why not?” The young man heard the voice from a distance, but very clearly. “Much better, really. She didn’t lose much time. Married a fellow who was on the boat going out with them, a Scotchman—married almost as soon as they landed. Patsey seems to think he’s a good fellow. Man about thirty. A farmer. Patsey’s in service. She’s a cook. You’d think she might as well have cooked for Olga and her husband—they haven’t any servant, of course—but she got a chance of good wages. She sent me some money last week. She oughtn’t to—she’s too good, she’s—” His voice broke and startled Lawrance into a sense of the old man’s reality as himself.

“It must be pretty bad for you.”

“Well. She had to go. It seems a long time now: soon after you went to Switzerland—almost at once. And Olga wanted to go, too. Of course Ewing hadn’t given himself up then.”

"What do you mean!" Lawrance's senses were no longer thinly fluctuant, they were suddenly in spate.

"Ewing killed Tofton. Didn't you know?"

"Why did he?"

"He lost his temper with him. They had a quarrel about that fountain-pen."

Lawrance laughed loudly, to his own surprise.

"Yes." The old man went quietly on. "Ewing went to Tofton's bedroom some time after midnight, and said he wanted his fountain-pen. They both got angry. Tofton hit Ewing, and then Ewing got hold of his razor. Tofton couldn't have been looking. Anyhow, he didn't step out of the way quickly enough."

"He couldn't have *meant* to have killed him." The narrative had steadied Lawrance. He found himself critical, observant. He could see Ewing with the razor in his hand, throwing back his unimportant little head.

"Well, he did, anyhow. They suspected Patsey and me. Got to know we owed him money. Nobody would speak to us. Hard lines on the girls—little Marjorie. And that Fred Bovey—he chucked Doris, and— Well. Patsey couldn't stand it. Ewing begged her not to go, but she would, and in the end he lent her some money for the passage. He got another job all right, you know, —better pay, too. Yes, lent her money. Said he could wait for it—"

"Did you know that he'd done it?"

"We didn't *know*."

"Why shouldn't Patsey come back now?"

"She won't come back. She's heard about Ewing. She wrote that she was all the more glad she'd gone. Ewing comes to trial this week."

"Will they hang him?"

"I can't tell. They oughtn't to; he gave himself up."

"The thing's absurd!" Lawrance was vehement. "You can't believe that he murdered Tofton because of a fountain-pen!"

"Well, there was that trouble at tea. And old Ewing, you know, he cared about Olga."

Ewing was immediately displaced from the young man's mind. There came the bitter vision of that girl with the long eyes and the rich hair—lost. Why hadn't he written to her, begged her to wait? But that wouldn't have been any use. What could he have begged her to wait for?—Gone utterly; married; mistress of a Canadian farm-house. What would become of her youth, her dreams, her spirit? Surely she might have had something better?—That fine gold of her youth and her virginity—She would have children. Her children and—

"What is his name?" he asked imperatively.

"Whose name?" The old man sipped his whiskey.

"The man who married Olga."

"Oh; Mac—something. I forget." Flynn rummaged in his pocket. "I believe I've got the letter here—"

"Oh, it doesn't matter."

The Mariner took out a letter, and Lawrance saw his own handwriting.

"Ah, this is the letter you wrote to Olga. I meant to have sent it on to her. I forgot; I'm sorry."

"Don't send it on. Give it to me."

Lawrance took the envelope, looked at the name: "Miss Olga Flynn"—then he tore it and threw it in the grate. "The children of Olga"—he applied that ter-

rible sentence that he had never realized as terrible before—"the children of Olga call Mac—Mac something—father." Better not to know the name. It would be too hard to the touch. Everything was hard to the touch now.

"Don't trouble about the other letter," he said sharply.

"It's a pity," the Mariner absently remarked after a pause. "Women—they're always suffering; I suppose they deserve it—except her. Sometimes you want 'em to suffer, sometimes you're glad when they do. You wish they would, eh? But not her. You see— What are we, eh? Only a lot of damned bed-bugs, after all. Spawn. That's true, ain't it?" He rambled on for awhile, jerkily and obscurely.

"Your life is done," thought Lawrance. "I wish I were you." Yes, the Mariner's life was done—done for; there was no doubt about that. Lawrance began to realize his impression of the change in his friend, who was his friend no longer. Friendship had dried out in the poor old man, dried out, with much else— He had not offered Lawrance a drink: it seemed to make a very great difference that he had not done that. His eyes were mean, except when he spoke of Patsey, then they had looked hurt, like a hurt beast's: but later, as he drank more and more, when they were not mean they were maudlin. Lawrance saw plainly now that he had taken to drinking too much, and drinking alone—"blaspheming Bacchus." He remembered a favourite saying of his: "Some people aren't fit to drink." And his brand of whiskey now was a cheap Scotch one. That familiar blackened meerschaum lay broken on the mantelpiece: of course there was nothing much in that; a mere coin-

vidence. Probably Marjorie had taken the pieces out of a drawer, been playing with them. Still— He was smoking a French briar—a pseudo-briar. . . . Lawrance, though disillusioned about the Mariner, was compassionate. Poor old man! Why should all his simple seasoned pleasures have been stripped from him? Surely he might have been allowed his good liquor, taken generally, he might have been allowed a new meerschaum, he might have been allowed to talk and play cards with his wife and family, and to say scandalous things when he was in the mood: to talk improbably about his nautical experiences— His clothes had always been untidy and old, but now they were dirty, they had lost their look of individuality in defiance, and were declassed as their oldness and untidiness had never declassed them. He had no necktie. Lawrance remembered the gay ties he used to wear, jauntily knotted.

“You know—” he broke a long pause, “if you do want any money—”

“Money? Patsey sent me some—”

“Well, if you want any more—at any time—”

The Mariner did not answer. He drank more whiskey; with none of his old fastidious gusto.

“You’re drinking too much.”

“Don’t think so.” Old Flynn was not in the least indignant. “Always have.”

“Not in that way.”

“Your fault—partly.” The Mariner spoke as though answering quite another suggestion. “I don’t blame you—mind you, I don’t blame you. No use blaming anybody. It’s the way it all went— They said things about Olga and you, too—all came out; talked about. Bad for the girl. Well—Patsey.— House not meant to

be without her, you see—her and Olga. Ewing—he had great respec' for Patsey, great respec'. Even Deavitt—'—he gulped—"respected her. About Tof-ton, you see—huh—wouldn't believe, would you, that that swine struck her—"

"Good God! Why on earth did you let him stay on?"

"Oh—money, of course, and—er—other things. Did it for the best. Everything for the best." He drew his spare frame up with drunken dignity for a moment, and then collapsed. "Turn the gas lower, won't you? Hurts my eyes."

"I'd better be going."

"I'm going, too." Flynn staggered to his feet. "I never sit here. I sit in the parlour. Stoopid sitting there, I suppose; might as well be in my grave— Don't like this room. You can go away if you like, I'm going to the parlour. Bring the whiskey." Lawrance took the bottle, and gave his other arm to the old man. "Yes, you better go. I'm not fit for you, you're not fit for me. Not now. Tell you the truth, I don't like seeing you. You understand. No offence." He disengaged his arm, and leaned heavily against the sideboard, looking hard at the ground. "An Irish blackguard, that's what I am. D'you think she'd have left me if I'd been any good? Wasn't any good to her."

He walked on unsteadily in front of his visitor, out of the room. Doris, hearing them, came from the kitchen to the hall, as Lawrance was putting on his hat.

"Oh, Mr. Lawrance! Aren't you staying to supper? It's rather late, I'm afraid, but it won't be long."

"Thank you, Doris, but I must be off now."

He was watching Mr. Flynn fumbling at the door of the "parlour"—that stuffy cold unused room in which

he had interviewed the Police Inspector. He noted his old friend's short coat and the familiar length of grey trouser below it. So the Mariner was broken, so late. Doris stepped forward, looking ashamed, and shut the door behind her father.

"Well, ta-ta!" she said in her high strained pitch. "You'll come again soon, won't you—now you *are* back—and cheer Father up? He *will* go on sitting in that old parlour. He—oh, I suppose he's all right, really." She looked ashamed again. "I wish you'd come soon," she added in a softened tone. She blushed: then with a belying personal appeal: "He isn't happy at all; any one would be sorry, wouldn't they?"

Lawrance put the whiskey-bottle down on the hall table and wished her good-bye.

CHAPTER XXXIV

CYPRIAN'S Diary arrived the next day. Lawrance did not open the package till his work was over and he was back in his little hotel in Bloomsbury. He did not feel much curiosity about the Diary; no more and no less curiosity than he could feel about anything. A letter from his sister had come that morning, too. Lady Petistree and Lady Blanche were leaving earlier than they had planned: Lady Blanche seemed more bored than ever by St. Franz: "She says it may have cured her, but now it's killing her with ennui." So Letty would be back at the end of the next week; Doctor Meyer had approved. She wrote excitedly: she did not mention Cyprian Strange's death. Lawrance had read the letter through twice running, and answered it immediately. He said everything that he ought to say. It was impossible to be interested. . . .

As he loitered in the hall of the hotel a young girl passed him; her hair was dark against her white neck. He trembled, thought of Olga, of her hair and how it might have fallen against his neck, his breast— So much had he done for pride and honour, for decency and "the right thing"!

There was half-an-hour or so before dinner. He might as well look at the Diary: it was in his hands. He went into the smoking-room, chose a corner, and sat down in one of the red leather armchairs.

On what day had Strange died? he wondered, as he

undid the package. He turned first to the present month, of which all the pages seemed to be blank.— No, there were a couple of lines written just a week ago:

I am fighting hard. I may live and not die.

That was the last entry: seven days back. And now he was dead. Such things were common; in time of war they happened thousands of times every day: they never struck any the less deep, though, and there was never any more to be said. That kind of finality. . . . There were three young officers in the smoking-room with him, in London on leave, probably; in a week's time perhaps one of them . . . well. He opened the Diary at the beginning:

*“Though one be fair as roses,
His beauty clouds and closes,
And well though Love reposes,
In the end it is not well.”*

Appropriate, certainly.

He turned the pages, many at a time, till another quotation, under an August date, arrested him. Young Strange, it seemed, had a fancy for quoting.

To-day is the first anniversary of this darling little war.

*“And what of logic or of truth appears
In tacking ‘Anno Domini’ to the years?”*

The words of Thomas Hardy smote Lawrance, words destroying with their weight of passion all the clever lies of all the clever bishops who ever lived.

He turned back to the date of his arrival with Letty

at St. Franz. His eye soon caught his own name—*Mr. Lawrance and his*— The word *wife* had been crossed out, and *sister* substituted. He frowned at the handwriting, which was careless, difficult to read; the spelling was bad, too, and there was practically no punctuation. Lawrance, from his Office training, had a precise eye for these things. Really, to have to go through the whole Diary!— Again he turned the leaves. Yes, the writing was all pretty much the same. “And he can—I mean could—write clearly when he wanted to. That last entry and the quotations were all right.” What a lazy chap! Hang it, he was forgetting that Strange was dead: you couldn’t get annoyed with a man who was dead.

He came again to his own name, and read on with difficulty:

Mr. Lawrance is a dry stick, but he has a sister. Meredith says somewhere of one of his heroes “But—he has a leg.” He recurs to this as I recur to Mr. Lawrance having a sister—very important.

Strange oughtn’t to have shown him this Diary; not a decent thing to do, not at all. He skimmed to an entry of a few days later:

This Lawrance isn’t commonplace, as I thought. A little scrutiny reveals that he has a really passionate face—I don’t mean passionate as “sensual,” or “sensuous,” even, though I’ve no doubt the fellow’s desires whip him, as these entertaining Americans say, “all the time.”

The reader blushed with embarrassment and annoy-

ance: he resented utterly the intimacy of this. But he had, of course, to read on.

He is virtuous, he is one of those good moral ones, he is perfectly continent. "‘So am not I,’ quoth the foolish scullion.” But he has tremendous store of feeling, and no sense of humour. Not stupid, though, as you think at first. Stubborn as the devil, honourable, certainly a gentleman. One of those people who are unquestionably gentlemen without being in the least aristocrats. I’m not so much of a gentleman, maybe. I’m an adventurer tinged with aristocracy. By God! he doesn’t adventure, he keeps within doors. Reserved to the limit. You couldn’t think of calling him by his Christian name.

What was Strange about, imagining that this Diary could possibly be published? What possible public interest. . . ? “‘He must have passed it on to me out of sheer malice—well, perhaps not that, but as a kind of ‘rag.’— And ‘stubborn.’ I’m not stubborn. I’m particularly reasonable. Inge or Ralston could have told him that. They know. ‘No sense of humour.’ As if I were one of those people who never can see a joke. A lot he knows about my character. I was quite right to mistrust his observation—extremely shallow and all off the point. ‘A gentleman’— Thank you. I suppose almost any one can tell the difference between a gentleman and a bounder. I never pretended to be an aristocrat. And what does he—did he—know about me, anyhow?”

He has a sister. I mean to get on with him. (“Well, I knew that.”) He must be very devoted to her. He has a wife, I discover—left her in England. Well, there

are many reasons for leaving wives in England. However, his reasons must be unimpeachable. (Lawrance's cheek had a deep dark flush.) I detect that the sister is one of those who have been brought up to dissipate her amorousness in harmless flirtations. (Lawrance flushed more heavily still. He was now really angry.) Well, we shall see about that. St. Franz is not an Anglican parish, and a good thing, too! No consumptive should hesitate. Of course I shall have her.

Lawrance violently closed the book. He would not read any more. If Strange had thought he would read any more, after that—! No more outrageous insult—! His *sister*! The most indecent thing he had ever heard of in all his life! He slipped the book into his pocket, and went at once to wash his hands for dinner.

His occupation for the evening was to go to Kensington and find lodgings.

When he got back to the hotel, it was early yet, but he decided to go to bed. He was tired: there was nothing else to do. If he slept, he would not be thinking. He wished that Nature required a full twelve hours of sleep: then there would be practically no margin to his Office work and his meals. He undressed slowly, doing nothing automatically, but concentrating his attention.

He could not go off to sleep. He had slept heavily the night before; perhaps, he thought, that was why he was now so wakeful.— Olga— “And yet not I, but Olga in me”— Oh, of course he would get over it. People always did—only a question of time. He must control himself, he must use his will. But he felt so defenceless, lying there in the dark. It had been a mistake to go to bed so early— There were many other things to

think of: the war; Zeppelin raids; submarines; how could any decent man keep boxed up in his own troubles, with so much suffering everywhere? He might ring and get the latest edition of the evening paper. Then Letty; she was coming back, she was cured. That Diary— Now, at last, Lawrance did succeed in separating his thoughts from Olga. He would never read any more of that Diary. To read more would be dishonouring to Letty—would seem as though he suspected her. At what point, he wondered, had Cyprian Strange realized that he must give up? Would he have acknowledged his failure in his Diary, or would he have been too much of a coxcomb for that? Lawrance recalled his dandified ways, recalled the things he used to say.— He wrote very much as he talked; a little less easily, perhaps, more with an eye to effect. For instance, he would never have said: “*I detect* that she is—” Rather a stilted phrase. Lawrance would not have used it in his articles. What good, though, were his articles? He had developed a facility for framing sentences of very little meaning, that was all. Did he ever think?— Well—

It would not be disagreeable to read that fellow’s admission of his failure . . . but no, he was quite right to have made up his mind not to read any more. To have made up his mind.— Strange was not very clever for such a “squire of dames”—not very observant. Yes, that was his weak point, he had no observation; no *true* observation, only a superficial and sensational kind. He must have recognized that he had been altogether mistaken about Letty,—there had been time enough for that,—must have seen that she was not in the least like that “white Saxon girl”—that young woman from

Leipsic with whom he had had an affair; an affair described, no doubt, in detail in the Diary. The man had no shame!

What should he do with the Diary, though? That suggestion of getting it published—what impertinence! He would destroy it. . . . But that seemed hardly right: the Diary of a dead man. . . . He could lock it up, keep it always locked up. What would be the good of that, though?

Perhaps there was something important in the little book, something that ought to be read? Well, it would have to go unread, then. . . . "It will have to go unread," he reflected again, with vehemence. The quality of Lawrance's determination had become curiously vitiated through its repeated unhappy applications. His determination, his will, and his emotions, that he had never known how to use, had kept on throwing up sullen little hillocks in his path.

He lay awake for more than two hours, cut by one broken thought after another. How little everything had led to! He saw that, though without analysis, without active grasp. The only way in which he could keep himself from thinking of Olga was by thinking of Letty and of Cyprian Strange. He did not consciously argue himself into continuing the reading of the Diary, and when he finally got out of bed, turned on the light, and took the book from his coat-pocket, he was shocked by surprise at himself. But it had become impossible to lie awake any longer.

. . . and a good thing, too! No consumptive should hesitate. . . .

Something about Lady Blanche now:

Lady Blanche (He spelt the baffling handwriting slowly out:) *rebuffed me this afternoon. I received her rebuff with imperturbable sang-froid. I may be a match for her yet; if only I were well I would be. She is unromantic and intelligent, without conscience, but still under the code—a little. Of course she wants to excite me. Not undesirous, not undesirable. Something should be made of her. . . . This morning a letter from the Archangel, with a sonnet on Lust.*

“It seems the fellow is obsessed by sex, and his friends as well. ‘The Archangel!’” Lawrance settled his pillows and yawned. Perhaps this Diary, of which he had made so much matter, would send him to sleep. No allusion to Letty on that page: probably she would not be mentioned again. After all, Strange had not seen much of her. . . .

*“That slandered shape that is Love’s very kin,
Interpreter, fulfiller, whose name is writ
Love’s brother and indissoluble twin,
Creator of forms to mould Love’s spirit in. . . .”*

“Well, did Strange think that ought to be published? Disgraceful stuff.” Everybody knew lust had nothing to do with love. . . . His eye ran on; he was getting more used to the handwriting.

There is a great deal to be said for being quite open, for saying simply “I desire you”—to paint the pleasures of love. Girls are not used to that kind of attack. They often succumb to it.

“This is odious,” thought Lawrance. “What kind of girls could he have had to do with?”

He turned the page, turned three or four pages, barely glancing at the entries. Then there came one much more clearly written than usual, much less closely, standing by itself under one date:

It is certain now—the best cup and the last.

Lawrance read on, read, with his head bent to the leaves, every word of the writing that followed, again in close-set lines. Incredible, it was incredible, he couldn't believe it! The invention of a coxcomb, of a roué, a lying vain blackguard!

At the end came:

God, I love her! This is just the opposite of what I had expected.

Then the rest of the page blank.

Lawrance read it all through again, wincing again under the alternations of cynicism and sentimentality. "Impossible— Why, Letty—!" She was such a "nice girl," anybody would have said she was such a nice girl— There was his mother, it would be the one thing she would feel—but it was impossible.

She is better, came after the blank space. *Her good brother will no doubt take the credit for that. She is less "frivolous."* Oh, yes, Mr. Lawrance, she is less frivolous! *She is no longer "the lady"—not in that way. She will be cured. "You go to life," I told her. "I salute you from the arena." Once I said the same thing to Lady Blanche, and she replied, "Don't say such silly things." My Letitia never could have answered like that. She said nothing; she looked at me. I know*

she does not love me, I know I love her. It is this that is so extraordinary, when you think of everything.

“Quite extraordinary,” Lawrance tried to reflect ironically. “A little too extraordinary, in fact. Too improbable even for your little essay in fiction, Mr. Cyprian Strange.”

There were hardly any more entries: that was to be, it seemed, the final outrage of Cyprian Strange’s pen—that implication that he had—could have—cured the “good brother’s” sister. One or two more isolated lines, that was all:

I’m killing myself, but I can’t resist L., her stored up treasure. . . . She will have something of the attraction of a widow, as well. . . . I think of Pater’s phrase, “sweet usage” . . .

Lawrance tore the Diary from its cover, struck a match, put the little block of red-edged sheets into the empty grate, and made ashes of them. He turned off the electric switch, went to the window, drew the blind, and put his head out for the mild breath of the September night. The moon looked at him like a pantaloons with a hooded mouth.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE autumn waned. It was now near the end of October, and Lawrance, looking out on to Fishgate Street from the Office window at the closing in of the afternoon, reflected that the days were just about as short now as they had been at the time of his wedding anniversary; just about. Eight months ago.

As he went on with his proof-correcting he kept urging himself dully to the conclusion that all had been for the best. The news from Malstowe that morning, that was argument strong enough, surely? Letty was engaged to be married to young Phillips, her old admirer, —in the Army now, and, by good luck, with a commission. The wedding would come off very soon, as the bridegroom would be going to France with his regiment. "Quite a quiet wedding," Mrs. Lawrance had written, "but nice and military, like everything is now." She was evidently well pleased: preoccupied by the pleasure, for she hardly touched upon her legal affairs.

Letty he had not seen since Lady Petistree had handed her over to him in London. There had been no tea-party with Lord Burpham—no exposures. Lawrance thought that Lord Burpham regarded him now and again with a puzzled look; he could not be sure. How little that mattered! The brother and sister had lunched together. "I asked him to send you the Diary," she had said, and he replied: "I've read it." These were the only words

on that matter between them; hers had not shocked him: he had known, really, that the Diary told the truth. The atmosphere of that cursed place . . . she had not been herself . . . anyhow, no harm had come. And Letty was cured. Lawrance repeated to himself that he had good reason to be glad that he had gone at that time to St. Franz. Very good reason. Yes, in spite of that affair of Strange: that was outweighed. One must be reasonable: one must see that it was certainly outweighed.

And for himself, he would get over the loss of Olga. Even after the six or seven weeks, why, it was much better. Much better. The pain was duller—generally: of course, sometimes—when he lay awake, when he woke—but he could stand it. He was getting over all that—

“Yes, but what,” came snapping his reasoned consolations, “but what are you getting over it *to*?”— Muriel had despised him—Olga, too; even Doris, perhaps . . . and Mary . . .

Lawrance concentrated his mind fully, for a time, upon his proof-correcting.

Then: It was the worst thing of all that could have happened. Of all. Marriage. And a marriage of that kind. Olga could not have been in love. To throw him over for what wasn't the finest!— Three thousand miles away. He faced the event defiantly. Wasn't that the better way, the quicker way? he demanded. As to what he was getting *to*, let that come. After all, there must be something for him in infinity. You couldn't follow that sort of idea; all the more reason that there might be truth in it. . . . The Mariner and his ideas about Good and Evil . . . figs and thistles. But there was more in the matter than that. If you could only

get at causes . . . rules. The obscurity was impenetrable: still, you had to go on. Poor old Mariner! Lawrance had not been to Glasden Road since that time: he would not go again, not yet. Perhaps later on—but it might be better not; almost certainly better not.

From the Mariner his thoughts passed to Ewing, who had committed suicide in prison, just before he was to be tried: how he had done it had not been published. No doubt the warders were off their guard with poor little Ewing—a man like that who seemed a nothing; he had given himself up, too. Ewing could do that, could kill a man, give himself up, and then kill himself, save himself from the gross dealings of the Law. And he had seemed a nothing. He had ended in the right tragic way, this unnoticeable little bank-clerk: a great catastrophe. With Lawrance himself, how was it, all this? Too dull, too heavy: shapelessly dragging days.

He had talked to himself of “getting at causes”; couldn’t he get, at least, at the cause of his own present suffering? Lawrance’s Puritanism, so operative against himself, so little operative against others, rose up to convict him. It was his own blame. He had allowed his wife’s jealousy of Olga to turn him to the girl: that night of their going to the Music-Hall, he had lapsed then, he had blasphemed his spirit. Everything had followed from that lapse, from that blasphemy. He had done wrong! Why hadn’t he known that, fully, at the time? Now he was punished. But yet—

“Oh, Mr. Lawrance, I must see you for a few minutes when you’re done with those proofs. Really believe I’ve hit on something at last—Israfel and I between us—ah, ha, ‘None sing so wildly well!’ Don’t forget!”

Mr. Inge, pale and obese, waddled back hopefully to

his room behind the plate-glass door. He was still trying to forecast the date of the end of the war, though admitting that it seemed harder to do that successfully now than it had in February. But he had been fairly successful in other ways, had brought off some lucky hits: the Zeppelin raids had at least had an effect upon his prophetic prestige. His ideas teemed no less than ever: Lawrance and he had exactly the same kind of talks on "general business," Lawrance kept staving off his "inspirations," or winnowing them, in just the same way.

" . . . before the 1st prox.—we shall be regretfully compelled—to place the matter in the hands of our solicitors." Old Ralston's voice came, as before, with its tired insistence.

Yes, the days were certainly just about the same length as they had been in February, just about.

In half-an-hour or so Lawrance would be going back to his home in Chiswick. His wife had returned the week before; she was there at home. Getting better. He must remember to be very kind to her; she was not really well yet. He would have to be considerate, tactful: any decent man would be, of course. Deavitt would be in London on leave soon: he would ask him to dinner, that would please her, he had told her that Deavitt was a cousin of Lord Burpham's. Muriel . . . she remained, she was his wife. Well? And what could any one fairly say against Muriel? Many a man had a worse wife. "I'm pretty well off, really—oughtn't to complain—you can't have everything—haven't run amuck, anyhow—might be much worse—a man must make the best of all he's got."

The blind faces of his virtues were about him.

" . . . and we shall be glad to receive a cheque from

you—in settlement of our account—as enclosed—‘as enclosed,’ you’ve got that?—at your very earliest convenience.”

“Ready now, Mr. Lawrance? Won’t keep you long; know you want to get back home early. Of course. And how is Mrs. Lawrance? Better? Ah, that’s good; ’m, yes. That’s good news.”

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